

November 17, 2025

Christina Beusch  
Rules Coordinator  
Office of the Attorney General  
Sent to [agorulemaking@atg.wa.gov](mailto:agorulemaking@atg.wa.gov)

Re: Support for Proposed Improvements to Public Records Act Model Rules

Dear Ms. Beusch:

When The Seattle Times initiated the news media's rulemaking petition more than a year ago, our reporters and others in the media coalition were experiencing a crisis in public records access. Unfortunately, the same barriers to important public information persist today. Slow processing is still the norm, even for simple records requests. Journalists routinely receive lengthy time estimates bearing little or no connection to the difficulty of their requests. In this era of fragile democracy and threats to press freedom, it is critically important for Washington State to honor the right to meaningful oversight of government.

For all the same reasons explained in the original petition and in our March 7, 2025 response to informal comments on the petition, The Seattle Times urges Attorney General Nick Brown to adopt the model rules as proposed by his office. The published proposal already takes into account the local agency concerns voiced in both informal and formal proceedings.

To briefly respond to comments in the recent public hearing:

- The words "prompt," "promptly" and "most timely possible action" come straight from the Act itself and do not set a new standard.
- The proposed rules are realistic and not as rigid as some objectors suggested, using terms such as "when appropriate" [WAC 44-14-040(1)], "as soon as practicable" [WAC 44-14-030(3)], "endeavor to... if practicable" [WAC 44-14-040(1)]; and "should ... if it is practicable" [WAC 44-14-040(2)].
- The third-party notice language is drawn from the Public Records Act and from the existing explanatory comments incorporated in WAC Chapter 44-14.
- The language on installments comes from the Act itself and from case law interpreting the Act.

In other words, adopting the proposed rules will simply make the model rules conform to the law while providing better guidance on best practices. This is consistent with the Attorney General's duty under RCW 42.56.570 to adopt model rules that guide agencies in "providing fullest assistance to requesters" and "fulfilling large requests in the most efficient manner."

While agencies undoubtedly struggle with budget constraints, they must remember that the Public Records Act is an essential tool for maintaining public trust and support. Moreover, it is a voter mandate.

# The Seattle Times

The Seattle Times appreciates the hard work and collaboration of the staff in the Attorney General's Office in responding to the media petition, including arriving at reasonable compromises. Thank you for considering these comments in support of the proposed rules.

Sincerely,

Michele Matassa Flores  
Executive Editor