

North Carolina Public Records Law

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NORTH CAROLINA STATUTES CHAPTER 132. PUBLIC RECORDS

§ 132 1. "Public records" defined

(a) "Public record" or "public records" shall mean all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, photographs, films, sound recordings, magnetic or other tapes, electronic data processing records, artifacts, or other documentary material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance in connection with the transaction of public business by any agency of North Carolina government or its subdivisions. Agency of North Carolina government or its subdivisions shall mean and include every public office, public officer or official (State or local, elected or appointed), institution, board, commission, bureau, council, department, authority or other unit of government of the State or of any county, unit, special district or other political subdivision of government.

(b) The public records and public information compiled by the agencies of North Carolina government or its subdivisions are the property of the people. Therefore, it is the policy of this State that the people may obtain copies of their public records and public information free or at minimal cost unless otherwise specifically provided by law. As used herein, "minimal cost" shall mean the actual cost of reproducing the public record or public information.

§ 132 1.1. Confidential communications by legal counsel to public board or agency; State tax information; public enterprise billing information; Address Confidentiality Program information

(a) Confidential Communications. Public records, as defined in G.S. 132 1, shall not include written communications (and copies thereof) to any public board, council, commission or other governmental body of the State or of any county, municipality or other political subdivision or unit of government, made within the scope of the attorney client relationship by any attorney at law serving any such governmental body, concerning any claim against or on behalf of the governmental body or the governmental entity for which such body acts, or concerning the prosecution, defense, settlement or litigation of any judicial action, or any administrative or other type of proceeding to which the governmental body is a party or by which it is or may be directly affected. Such written communication and copies thereof shall not be open to public inspection, examination or copying unless specifically made public by the governmental body receiving such written communications; provided, however, that such written communications and copies thereof shall become public records as defined in G.S. 132 1 three years from the date such communication was received by such public board, council, commission or other governmental body.

(b) State and Local Tax Information. Tax information may not be disclosed except as provided in G.S. 105 259. As used in this subsection, "tax information" has the same meaning as in G.S. 105 259. Local tax records that contain information about a taxpayer's income or receipts may not be disclosed except as provided in G.S. 153A 148.1 and G.S. 160A 208.1.

(c) Public Enterprise Billing Information. Billing information compiled and maintained by a city or county or other public entity providing utility services in connection with the ownership or operation of a public enterprise, excluding airports, is not a public record as defined in G.S. 132 1.

Nothing contained herein is intended to limit public disclosure by a city or county of billing information:

(1) That the city or county determines will be useful or necessary to assist bond counsel, bond underwriters, underwriters' counsel, rating agencies or investors or potential investors in making informed decisions regarding bonds or other obligations incurred or to be incurred with respect to the public enterprise;

(2) That is necessary to assist the city, county, State, or public enterprise to maintain the integrity and quality of services it provides; or

(3) That is necessary to assist law enforcement, public safety, fire protection, rescue, emergency management, or judicial officers in the performance of their duties.

As used herein, "billing information" means any record or information, in whatever form, compiled or maintained with respect to individual customers by any owner or operator of a public enterprise, as defined in G.S. 160A 311, excluding subdivision (9), and G.S. 153A 274, excluding subdivision (4), or other public entity providing utility services, excluding airports, relating to services it provides or will provide to the customer.

(d) Address Confidentiality Program Information. The actual address and telephone number of a program participant in the Address Confidentiality Program established under Chapter 15C of the General Statutes is not a public record within the meaning of Chapter 132. The actual address and telephone number of a program participant may not be disclosed except as provided in Chapter 15C of the General Statutes.

§ 132 1.2. Confidential information

Nothing in this Chapter shall be construed to require or authorize a public agency or its subdivision to disclose any information that:

(1) Meets all of the following conditions:

a. Constitutes a "trade secret" as defined in G.S. 66 152(3).

b. Is the property of a private "person" as defined in G.S. 66 152(2).

c. Is disclosed or furnished to the public agency in connection with the owner's performance of a public contract or in connection with a bid, application, proposal, industrial development project, or in compliance with laws, regulations, rules, or ordinances of the United States, the State, or political subdivisions of the State.

d. Is designated or indicated as "confidential" or as a "trade secret" at the time of its initial disclosure to the public agency.

(2) Reveals an account number for electronic payment as defined in G.S. 147 86.20 and obtained pursuant to Articles 6A or 6B of Chapter 147 of the General Statutes or G.S. 159 32.1.

(3) Reveals a document, file number, password, or any other information maintained by the Secretary of State pursuant to Article 21 of Chapter 130A of the General Statutes.

(4) Reveals the electronically captured image of an individual's signature, drivers license number, or a portion of an individual's social security number if the agency has those items because they are on a voter registration document.

§ 132 1.3. Settlements made by or on behalf of public agencies, public officials, or public employees; public records

(a) Public records, as defined in G.S. 132 1, shall include all settlement documents in any suit, administrative proceeding or arbitration instituted against any agency of North Carolina government or its subdivisions, as defined in G.S. 132 1, in connection with or arising out of such agency's official actions, duties or responsibilities, except in an action for medical malpractice against a hospital facility. No agency of North Carolina government or its subdivisions, nor any counsel, insurance company or other representative acting on behalf of such agency, shall approve, accept or enter into any settlement of any such suit, arbitration or proceeding if the settlement provides that its terms and conditions shall be confidential, except in an action for medical malpractice against a hospital facility. No settlement document sealed under subsection (b) of this section shall be open for public inspection.

(b) No judge, administrative judge or administrative hearing officer of this State, nor any board or commission, nor any arbitrator appointed pursuant to the laws of North Carolina, shall order or permit the sealing of any settlement document in any proceeding described herein except on the basis of a written order concluding that (1) the presumption of openness is overcome by an overriding interest and (2) that such overriding interest cannot be protected by any measure short of sealing the settlement. Such order shall articulate the overriding interest and shall include findings of fact that are sufficiently specific to permit a reviewing court to determine whether the order was proper.

(c) Except for confidential communications as provided in G.S. 132 1.1, the term "settlement documents," as used herein, shall include all documents which reflect, or which are made or utilized in connection with, the terms and conditions upon which any proceedings described in this section are compromised, settled, terminated or dismissed, including but not limited to correspondence, settlement agreements, consent orders, checks, and bank drafts.

§ 132 1.4. Criminal investigations; intelligence information records

(a) Records of criminal investigations conducted by public law enforcement agencies or records of criminal intelligence information compiled by public law enforcement agencies are not public records as defined by G.S. 132 1. Records of criminal investigations conducted by public law enforcement agencies or records of criminal intelligence information may be released by order of a court of competent jurisdiction.

(b) As used in this section:

(1) "Records of criminal investigations" means all records or any information that pertains to a person or group of persons that is compiled by public law enforcement agencies for the purpose of attempting to prevent or solve violations of the law, including information derived from witnesses, laboratory tests, surveillance, investigators, confidential informants, photographs, and measurements.

(2) "Records of criminal intelligence information" means records or information that pertain to a person or group of persons that is compiled by a public law enforcement agency in an effort to anticipate, prevent, or monitor possible violations of the law.

(3) "Public law enforcement agency" means a municipal police department, a county police department, a sheriff's department, a company police agency commissioned by the Attorney General pursuant to G.S. 74E 1, et seq., and any State or local agency, force, department, or unit responsible for investigating, preventing, or solving violations of the law.

(4) "Violations of the law" means crimes and offenses that are prosecutable in the criminal courts in this State or the United States and infractions as defined in G.S. 14 3.1.

(5) "Complaining witness" means an alleged victim or other person who reports a violation or apparent violation of the law to a public law enforcement agency.

(c) Notwithstanding the provisions of this section, and unless otherwise prohibited by law, the following information shall be public records within the meaning of G.S. 132 1.

(1) The time, date, location, and nature of a violation or apparent violation of the law reported to a public law enforcement agency.

(2) The name, sex, age, address, employment, and alleged violation of law of a person arrested, charged, or indicted.

(3) The circumstances surrounding an arrest, including the time and place of the arrest, whether the arrest involved resistance, possession or use of weapons, or pursuit, and a description of any items seized in connection with the arrest.

(4) The contents of "911" and other emergency telephone calls received by or on behalf of public law enforcement agencies, except for such contents that reveal the name, address, telephone number, or other information that may identify the caller, victim, or witness.

(5) The contents of communications between or among employees of public law enforcement agencies that are broadcast over the public airways.

(6) The name, sex, age, and address of a complaining witness.

(d) A public law enforcement agency shall temporarily withhold the name or address of a complaining witness if release of the information is reasonably likely to pose a threat to the mental health, physical health, or personal safety of the complaining witness or materially compromise a continuing or future criminal investigation or criminal intelligence operation. Information temporarily withheld under this subsection shall be made available for release to the public in accordance with G.S. 132 6 as soon as the circumstances that justify withholding it cease to exist. Any person denied access to information withheld under this subsection may apply to a court of competent jurisdiction for an order compelling disclosure of the information. In such action, the court shall balance the interests of the public in disclosure against the interests of the law enforcement agency and the alleged victim in withholding the information. Actions brought pursuant to this subsection shall be set down for immediate hearing, and subsequent proceedings in such actions shall be accorded priority by the trial and appellate courts.

(e) If a public law enforcement agency believes that release of information that is a public record under subdivisions (c)(1) through (c)(5) of this section will jeopardize the right of the State to prosecute a defendant or the right of a defendant to receive a fair trial or will undermine an ongoing or future investigation, it may seek an order from a court of competent jurisdiction to

prevent disclosure of the information. In such action the law enforcement agency shall have the burden of showing by a preponderance of the evidence that disclosure of the information in question will jeopardize the right of the State to prosecute a defendant or the right of a defendant to receive a fair trial or will undermine an ongoing or future investigation. Actions brought pursuant to this subsection shall be set down for immediate hearing, and subsequent proceedings in such actions shall be accorded priority by the trial and appellate courts.

(f) Nothing in this section shall be construed as authorizing any public law enforcement agency to prohibit or prevent another public agency having custody of a public record from permitting the inspection, examination, or copying of such public record in compliance with G.S. 132 6. The use of a public record in connection with a criminal investigation or the gathering of criminal intelligence shall not affect its status as a public record.

(g) Disclosure of records of criminal investigations and criminal intelligence information that have been transmitted to a district attorney or other attorney authorized to prosecute a violation of law shall be governed by this section and Chapter 15A of the General Statutes.

(h) Nothing in this section shall be construed as requiring law enforcement agencies to disclose the following:

(1) Information that would not be required to be disclosed under Chapter 15A of the General Statutes; or

(2) Information that is reasonably likely to identify a confidential informant.

(i) Law enforcement agencies shall not be required to maintain any tape recordings of "911" or other communications for more than 30 days from the time of the call, unless a court of competent jurisdiction orders a portion sealed.

(j) When information that is not a public record under the provisions of this section is deleted from a document, tape recording, or other record, the law enforcement agency shall make clear that a deletion has been made. Nothing in this subsection shall authorize the destruction of the original record.

(k) The following court records are public records and may be withheld only when sealed by court order: arrest and search warrants that have been returned by law enforcement agencies, indictments, criminal summons, and nontestimonial identification orders.

(l) Records of investigations of alleged child abuse shall be governed by Article 29 of Chapter 7B of the General Statutes.

§ 132 1.5. 911 database

Automatic number identification and automatic location identification information that consists of the name, address, and telephone numbers of telephone subscribers which is contained in a county 911 database is confidential and is not a public record as defined by Chapter 132 of the General Statutes if that information is required to be confidential by the agreement with the telephone company by which the information was obtained. Dissemination of the information contained in the 911 automatic number and automatic location database is prohibited except on a call by call basis only for the purpose of handling emergency calls or for training, and any permanent record of the information shall be secured by the public safety answering points and disposed of in a manner which will retain that security except as otherwise required by applicable law.

§ 132 1.6. Emergency response plans

Emergency response plans adopted by a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina, a community college, or a public hospital as defined in G.S. 159 39 and the records related to the planning and development of these emergency response plans are not public records as defined by G.S. 132 1 and shall not be subject to inspection and examination under G.S. 132 6.

§ 132 1.7. Sensitive public security information

(a) Public records, as defined in G.S. 132 1, shall not include information containing specific details of public security plans and arrangements or the detailed plans and drawings of public buildings and infrastructure facilities.

(b) Public records as defined in G.S. 132 1 do not include plans to prevent or respond to terrorist activity, to the extent such records set forth vulnerability and risk assessments, potential targets, specific tactics, or specific security or emergency procedures, the disclosure of which would jeopardize the safety of governmental personnel or the general public or the security of any governmental facility, building, structure, or information storage system.

(c) Information relating to the general adoption of public security plans and arrangements, and budgetary information concerning the authorization or expenditure of public funds to implement public security plans and arrangements, or for the construction, renovation, or repair of public buildings and infrastructure facilities shall be public records.

§ 132 2. Custodian designated

The public official in charge of an office having public records shall be the custodian thereof.

§ 132 3. Destruction of records regulated

(a) Prohibition. No public official may destroy, sell, loan, or otherwise dispose of any public record, except in accordance with G.S. 121 5 and G.S. 130A 99, without the consent of the Department of Cultural Resources. Whoever unlawfully removes a public record from the office where it is usually kept, or alters, defaces, mutilates or destroys it shall be guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor and upon conviction only fined not less than ten dollars (\$10.00) nor more than five hundred dollars (\$500.00).

(b) Revenue Records. Notwithstanding subsection (a) of this section and G.S. 121 5, when a record of the Department of Revenue has been copied in any manner, the original record may be destroyed upon the order of the Secretary of Revenue. If a record of the Department of Revenue has not been copied, the original record shall be preserved for at least three years. After three years the original record may be destroyed upon the order of the Secretary of Revenue.

(c) Employment Security Commission Records. Notwithstanding subsection (a) of this section and G.S. 121 5, when a record of the Employment Security Commission has been copied in any manner, the original record may be destroyed upon the order of the Chairman of the Employment Security Commission. If a record of the Commission has not been copied, the original record shall be preserved for at least three years. After three years the original record may be destroyed upon the order of the Chairman of the Employment Security Commission.

§ 132 4. Disposition of records at end of official's term

Whoever has the custody of any public records shall, at the expiration of his term of office, deliver to his successor, or, if there be none, to the Department of Cultural Resources, all records, books, writings, letters and documents kept or received by him in the transaction of his official business; and any such person who shall refuse or neglect for the space of 10 days after request made in writing by any citizen of the State to deliver as herein required such public records to the person authorized to receive them shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

§ 132 5. Demanding custody

Whoever is entitled to the custody of public records shall demand them from any person having illegal possession of them, who shall forthwith deliver the same to him. If the person who unlawfully possesses public records shall without just cause refuse or neglect for 10 days after a request made in writing by any citizen of the State to deliver such records to their lawful custodian, he shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

§ 132 5.1. Regaining custody; civil remedies

(a) The Secretary of the Department of Cultural Resources or his designated representative or any public official who is the custodian of public records which are in the possession of a person or agency not authorized by the custodian or by law to possess such public records may petition the superior court in the county in which the person holding such records resides or in which the materials in issue, or any part thereof, are located for the return of such public records. The court may order such public records to be delivered to the petitioner upon finding that the materials in issue are public records and that such public records are in the possession of a person not authorized by the custodian of the public records or by law to possess such public records. If the order of delivery does not receive compliance, the petitioner may request that the court enforce such order through its contempt power and procedures.

(b) At any time after the filing of the petition set out in subsection (a) or contemporaneous with such filing, the public official seeking the return of the public records may by ex parte petition request the judge or the court in which the action was filed to grant one of the following provisional remedies:

(1) An order directed at the sheriff commanding him to seize the materials which are the subject of the action and deliver the same to the court under the circumstances hereinafter set forth; or

(2) A preliminary injunction preventing the sale, removal, disposal or destruction of or damage to such public records pending a final judgment by the court.

(c) The judge or court aforesaid shall issue an order of seizure or grant a preliminary injunction upon receipt of an affidavit from the petitioner which alleges that the materials at issue are public records and that unless one of said provisional remedies is granted, there is a danger that such materials shall be sold, secreted, removed out of the State or otherwise disposed of so as not to be forthcoming to answer the final judgment of the court respecting the same; or that such property may be destroyed or materially damaged or injured if not seized or if injunctive relief is not granted.

(d) The aforementioned order of seizure or preliminary injunction shall issue without notice to the respondent and without the posting of any bond or other security by the petitioner.

§ 132 6. Inspection and examination of records

(a) Every custodian of public records shall permit any record in the custodian's custody to be inspected and examined at reasonable times and under reasonable supervision by any person, and shall, as promptly as possible, furnish copies thereof upon payment of any fees as may be prescribed by law. As used herein, "custodian" does not mean an agency that holds the public records of other agencies solely for purposes of storage or safekeeping or solely to provide data processing.

(b) No person requesting to inspect and examine public records, or to obtain copies thereof, shall be required to disclose the purpose or motive for the request.

(c) No request to inspect, examine, or obtain copies of public records shall be denied on the grounds that confidential information is commingled with the requested nonconfidential information. If it is necessary to separate confidential from nonconfidential information in order to permit the inspection, examination, or copying of the public records, the public agency shall bear the cost of such separation on the following schedule:

State agencies after June 30, 1996;

Municipalities with populations of 10,000 or more, counties with populations of 25,000 or more, as determined by the 1990 U.S. Census, and public hospitals in those counties, after June 30, 1997;

Municipalities with populations of less than 10,000, counties with populations of less than 25,000, as determined by the 1990 U.S. Census, and public hospitals in those counties, after June 30, 1998;

Political subdivisions and their agencies that are not otherwise covered by this schedule, after June 30, 1998.

(d) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (a) and (b) of this section, public records relating to the proposed expansion or location of specific business or industrial projects in the State may be withheld so long as their inspection, examination or copying would frustrate the purpose for which such public records were created; provided, however, that nothing herein shall be construed to permit the withholding of public records relating to general economic development policies or activities.

(e) The application of this Chapter is subject to the provisions of Article 1 of Chapter 121 of the General Statutes, the North Carolina Archives and History Act.

(f) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (a) of this section, the inspection or copying of any public record which, because of its age or condition could be damaged during inspection or copying, may be made subject to reasonable restrictions intended to preserve the particular record.

§ 132 6.1. Electronic data processing records

(a) After June 30, 1996, no public agency shall purchase, lease, create, or otherwise acquire any electronic data processing system for the storage, manipulation, or retrieval of public records unless it first determines that the system will not impair or impede the agency's ability to permit the public inspection and examination, and to provide electronic copies of such records. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to require the retention by the public agency of obsolete hardware or software.

(b) Every public agency shall create an index of computer databases compiled or created by a public agency on the following schedule:

State agencies by July 1, 1996;

Municipalities with populations of 10,000 or more, counties with populations of 25,000 or more, as determined by the 1990 U.S. Census, and public hospitals in those counties, by July 1, 1997;

Municipalities with populations of less than 10,000, counties with populations of less than 25,000, as determined by the 1990 U.S. Census, and public hospitals in those counties, by July 1, 1998;

Political subdivisions and their agencies that are not otherwise covered by this schedule, after June 30, 1998.

The index shall be a public record and shall include, at a minimum, the following information with respect to each database listed therein: a list of the data fields; a description of the format or record layout; information as to the frequency with which the database is updated; a list of any data fields to which public access is restricted; a description of each form in which the database can be copied or reproduced using the agency's computer facilities; and a schedule of fees for the production of copies in each available form. Electronic databases compiled or created prior to the date by which the index must be created in accordance with this subsection may be indexed at the public agency's option. The form, content, language, and guidelines for the index and the databases to be indexed shall be developed by the Office of Archives and History in consultation with officials at other public agencies.

(c) Nothing in this section shall require a public agency to create a computer database that the public agency has not otherwise created or is not otherwise required to be created. Nothing in this section requires a public agency to disclose security features of its electronic data processing systems, information technology systems, telecommunications networks, or electronic security systems, including hardware or software security, passwords, or security standards, procedures, processes, configurations, software, and codes.

(d) The following definitions apply in this section:

(1) Computer database. A structured collection of data or documents residing in a database management program or spreadsheet software.

(2) Computer hardware. Any tangible machine or device utilized for the electronic storage, manipulation, or retrieval of data.

(3) Computer program. A series of instructions or statements that permit the storage, manipulation, and retrieval of data within an electronic data processing system, together with any associated documentation. The term does not include the original data, or any analysis, compilation, or manipulated form of the original data produced by the use of the program or software.

(4) Computer software. Any set or combination of computer programs. The term does not include the original data, or any analysis, compilation, or manipulated form of the original data produced by the use of the program or software.

(5) Electronic data processing system. Computer hardware, computer software, or computer programs or any combination thereof, regardless of kind or origin.

§ 132 6.2. Provisions for copies of public records; fees

(a) Persons requesting copies of public records may elect to obtain them in any and all media in which the public agency is capable of providing them. No request for copies of public records in a particular medium shall be denied on the grounds that the custodian has made or prefers to make the public records available in another medium. The public agency may assess different fees for different media as prescribed by law.

(b) Persons requesting copies of public records may request that the copies be certified or uncertified. The fees for certifying copies of public records shall be as provided by law. Except as otherwise provided by law, no public agency shall charge a fee for an uncertified copy of a public record that exceeds the actual cost to the public agency of making the copy. For purposes of this subsection, "actual cost" is limited to direct, chargeable costs related to the reproduction of a public record as determined by generally accepted accounting principles and does not include costs that would have been incurred by the public agency if a request to reproduce a public record had not been made. Notwithstanding the provisions of this subsection, if the request is such as to require extensive use of information technology resources or extensive clerical or supervisory assistance by personnel of the agency involved, or if producing the record in the medium requested results in a greater use of information technology resources than that established by the agency for reproduction of the volume of information requested, then the agency may charge, in addition to the actual cost of duplication, a special service charge, which shall be reasonable and shall be based on the actual cost incurred for such extensive use of information technology resources or the labor costs of the personnel providing the services, or for a greater use of information technology resources that is actually incurred by the agency or attributable to the agency. If anyone requesting public information from any public agency is charged a fee that the requester believes to be unfair or unreasonable, the requester may ask the Information Resource Management Commission to mediate the dispute.

(c) Persons requesting copies of computer databases may be required to make or submit such requests in writing. Custodians of public records shall respond to all such requests as promptly as possible. If the request is granted, the copies shall be provided as soon as reasonably possible. If the request is denied, the denial shall be accompanied by an explanation of the basis for the denial. If asked to do so, the person denying the request shall, as promptly as possible, reduce the explanation for the denial to writing.

(d) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require a public agency to respond to requests for copies of public records outside of its usual business hours.

(e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require a public agency to respond to a request for a copy of a public record by creating or compiling a record that does not exist. If a public agency, as a service to the requester, voluntarily elects to create or compile a record, it may negotiate a reasonable charge for the service with the requester. Nothing in this section shall be construed to require a public agency to put into electronic medium a record that is not kept in electronic medium.

§ 132 7. Keeping records in safe places; copying or repairing; certified copies

Insofar as possible, custodians of public records shall keep them in fireproof safes, vaults, or rooms fitted with noncombustible materials and in such arrangement as to be easily accessible for convenient use. All public records should be kept in the buildings in which they are ordinarily used. Record books should be copied or repaired, renovated or rebound if worn, mutilated,

damaged or difficult to read. Whenever any State, county, or municipal records are in need of repair, restoration, or rebinding, the head of such State agency, department, board, or commission, the board of county commissioners of such county, or the governing body of such municipality may authorize that the records in need of repair, restoration, or rebinding be removed from the building or office in which such records are ordinarily kept, for the length of time required to repair, restore, or rebind them. Any public official who causes a record book to be copied shall attest it and shall certify on oath that it is an accurate copy of the original book. The copy shall then have the force of the original.

§ 132 8. Assistance by and to Department of Cultural Resources

The Department of Cultural Resources shall have the right to examine into the condition of public records and shall give advice and assistance to public officials in the solution of their problems of preserving, filing and making available the public records in their custody. When requested by the Department of Cultural Resources, public officials shall assist the Department in the preparation of an inclusive inventory of records in their custody, to which shall be attached a schedule, approved by the head of the governmental unit or agency having custody of the records and the Secretary of Cultural Resources, establishing a time period for the retention or disposal of each series of records. Upon the completion of the inventory and schedule, the Department of Cultural Resources shall (subject to the availability of necessary space, staff, and other facilities for such purposes) make available space in its Records Center for the filing of semicurrent records so scheduled and in its archives for noncurrent records of permanent value, and shall render such other assistance as needed, including the microfilming of records so scheduled.

§ 132 8.1. Records management program administered by Department of Cultural Resources; establishment of standards, procedures, etc.; surveys

A records management program for the application of efficient and economical management methods to the creation, utilization, maintenance, retention, preservation, and disposal of official records shall be administered by the Department of Cultural Resources. It shall be the duty of that Department, in cooperation with and with the approval of the Department of Administration, to establish standards, procedures, and techniques for effective management of public records, to make continuing surveys of paper work operations, and to recommend improvements in current records management practices including the use of space, equipment, and supplies employed in creating, maintaining, and servicing records. It shall be the duty of the head of each State agency and the governing body of each county, municipality and other subdivision of government to cooperate with the Department of Cultural Resources in conducting surveys and to establish and maintain an active, continuing program for the economical and efficient management of the records of said agency, county, municipality, or other subdivision of government.

§ 132 8.2. Selection and preservation of records considered essential; making or designation of preservation duplicates; force and effect of duplicates or copies thereof

In cooperation with the head of each State agency and the governing body of each county, municipality, and other subdivision of government, the Department of Cultural Resources shall establish and maintain a program for the selection and preservation of public records considered essential to the operation of government and to the protection of the rights and interests of persons, and, within the limitations of funds available for the purpose, shall make or cause to be made preservation duplicates or designate as preservation duplicates existing copies of such essential public records. Preservation duplicates shall be durable, accurate, complete and clear, and such duplicates made by a photographic, photostatic, microfilm, micro card, miniature photographic, or other process which accurately reproduces and forms a durable medium for so reproducing the original shall have the same force and effect for all purposes as the original record whether the original record is in existence or not. A transcript, exemplification, or certified copy of such preservation duplicate shall be deemed for all purposes to be a transcript,

exemplification, or certified copy of the original record. Such preservation duplicates shall be preserved in the place and manner of safekeeping prescribed by the Department of Cultural Resources.

§ 132 9. Access to records

(a) Any person who is denied access to public records for purposes of inspection and examination, or who is denied copies of public records, may apply to the appropriate division of the General Court of Justice for an order compelling disclosure or copying, and the court shall have jurisdiction to issue such orders. Actions brought pursuant to this section shall be set down for immediate hearing, and subsequent proceedings in such actions shall be accorded priority by the trial and appellate courts.

(b) In an action to compel disclosure of public records which have been withheld pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 132 6 concerning public records relating to the proposed expansion or location of particular businesses and industrial projects, the burden shall be on the custodian withholding the records to show that disclosure would frustrate the purpose of attracting that particular business or industrial project.

(c) In any action brought pursuant to this section in which a party successfully compels the disclosure of public records, the court may, in its discretion, allow the prevailing party to recover reasonable attorneys' fees if:

(1) The court finds that the agency acted without substantial justification in denying access to the public records; and

(2) The court finds that there are no special circumstances that would make the award of attorneys' fees unjust.

Any attorneys' fees assessed against a public agency under this section shall be charged against the operating expenses of the agency; provided, however, that the court may order that all or any portion of any attorneys' fees so assessed be paid personally by any public employee or public official found by the court to have knowingly or intentionally committed, caused, permitted, suborned, or participated in a violation of this Article. No order against any public employee or public official shall issue in any case where the public employee or public official seeks the advice of an attorney and such advice is followed.

(d) If the court determines that an action brought pursuant to this section was filed in bad faith or was frivolous, the court may, in its discretion, assess a reasonable attorney's fee against the person or persons instituting the action and award it to the public agency as part of the costs.

§ 132 10. Qualified exception for geographical information systems

Geographical information systems databases and data files developed and operated by counties and cities are public records within the meaning of this Chapter. The county or city shall provide public access to such systems by public access terminals or other output devices. Upon request, the county or city shall furnish copies, in documentary or electronic form, to anyone requesting them at reasonable cost. As a condition of furnishing an electronic copy, whether on magnetic tape, magnetic disk, compact disk, or photo optical device, a county or city may require that the person obtaining the copy agree in writing that the copy will not be resold or otherwise used for trade or commercial purposes. For purposes of this section, publication or broadcast by the news media, real estate trade associations, or Multiple Listing Services operated by real estate trade associations shall not constitute a resale or use of the data for trade or commercial purposes and

use of information without resale by a licensed professional in the course of practicing the professional's profession shall not constitute use for a commercial purpose. For purposes of this section, resale at cost by a real estate trade association or Multiple Listing Services operated by a real estate trade association shall not constitute a resale or use of the data for trade or commercial purposes.