



JOEL ANDERSON
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: April 21, 2026

19

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

ESTABLISHING A FULLY STANDARDIZED PUBLIC RECORDS ACT REQUEST REVIEW, DOCUMENT COMPILATION AND RESPONSE PROCESS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

The California Public Records Act (PRA) was enacted in 1968 to guarantee the public the right to access government records from state and local agencies in a timely and transparent manner. Once a request is submitted, agencies have ten days to respond, indicating whether they will provide the requested records or informing the requester they will need more time to comply with the request. An extension, which is allowable for unusual circumstances, such as voluminous or off-site records, is generally limited to fourteen days. Although agencies can withhold certain records, that action can only be taken if the requested information involves a specified exemption or privilege, such as personnel and medical files, preliminary drafts or notes, pending litigation or investigation records, or information protected by attorney-client privilege.

In 2022, the Board of Supervisors updated Board Policy A-54, "Public Access to County Records," directing the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors to establish a centralized Public Records Act Unit. This unit serves as the main point of contact for the public to request records and coordinates with County departments to provide timely responses to PRA requests. In 2024, the County implemented a software solution allowing the public to submit requests and assisting staff in managing and routing requests. Since then, the Clerk of the Board has coordinated responses to over 12,000 public records requests.

The County currently processes PRA requests through an online portal called NextRequest which requires the County to provide requestors an initial response within the required ten calendar days. These responses acknowledge requests while County staff determines if responsive and disclosable records exist. However, once a PRA request is received, it is often sent to the various County departments and staff expected to have responsive records. This process allows for differing interpretations and practices by the numerous PRA coordinators designated by their departments to oversee PRA request responses.

SUBJECT: ESTABLISHING A FULLY STANDARDIZED PUBLIC RECORDS ACT REQUEST REVIEW, DOCUMENT COMPILATION AND RESPONSE PROCESS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

To ensure consistent County responses to PRA requests, I recommend that the Board direct staff to update Board Policy A-54 to establish a fully standardized PRA request review, document compilation and response process designed to improve efficiency, consistency, transparency, and compliance with statutory requirements. Under the proposed framework, all PRA requests received by the County would be routed to the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors and County Technology Office, where requests would be logged, tracked, and assigned appropriate deadlines to ensure adherence to the timelines set forth in the California Public Records Act. The Technology Office would then be responsible for initiating the records search and compilation of responsive electronic records across relevant systems and departments, creating a more streamlined and organized process for handling PRA requests. Responsible departments would still be required to conduct a review of any paper records.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

SUPERVISOR JOEL ANDERSON

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to coordinate with the Clerk of the Board, County Technology Office, County Counsel and other relevant departments to update Board Policy A-54, "Public Access to County Records," to establish a fully standardized and coordinated Public Records Act (PRA) request review, document compilation and response process that would apply to all County departments, including elected offices, utilizing the NextRequest system, and return to the Board within 90 days with recommendations to implement the new process.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The recommendation to explore a fully standardized Public Records Act (PRA) request review, document compilation and response process is expected to positively contribute to equity by promoting consistent, fair, and transparent access to public records for all members of the community. The standardized process would help ensure that PRA requests are handled uniformly across departments, reducing disparities that may arise from inconsistent practices or varying levels of departmental resources. Improved tracking, oversight, and response timelines will enhance accessibility for individuals and communities who rely on public information, including those who may face barriers navigating complex government systems.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The proposed action to establish a fully centralized PRA process will support long-term organizational sustainability by promoting a more efficient and coordinated use of County resources. By streamlining intake, tracking, document compilation and review procedures, the County may reduce duplicative efforts, minimize delays, and improve overall operational effectiveness. The standardized approach would also enhance the County's ability to adapt to increasing volumes and complexity of PRA requests, ensuring processes remain scalable, consistent, and aligned with evolving legal and technological requirements. These improvements will contribute to maintaining fiscal stability and responsible resource management while supporting transparent and accountable government operations.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action at this time. There may be future fiscal impacts associated with future related recommendations which staff would return to the Board

SUBJECT: ESTABLISHING A FULLY STANDARDIZED PUBLIC RECORDS ACT REQUEST REVIEW, DOCUMENT COMPILATION AND RESPONSE PROCESS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

for consideration and approval. At this time, there will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

The proposed recommendation is expected to have a positive impact on the business community. A more standardized and efficient PRA process will provide businesses with clearer expectations, more consistent response timelines, and improved access to public records that may be necessary for due diligence, compliance, or operational planning. By reducing delays and inconsistencies, this approach will enhance transparency and reliability in interactions with the County, supporting a more predictable and business-friendly environment.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The California Public Records Act (PRA) was enacted in 1968 to guarantee the public the right to access government records from state and local agencies in a timely and transparent manner. Once a request is submitted, agencies have ten days to respond, indicating whether they will provide the requested records or informing the requester they will need more time to comply with the request. An extension, which is allowable for unusual circumstances, such as voluminous or off-site records, is generally limited to fourteen days. Although agencies can withhold certain records, that action can only be taken if the requested information involves a specified exemption or privilege, such as personnel and medical files, preliminary drafts or notes, pending litigation or investigation records, or information protected by attorney-client privilege.

In 2022, the Board of Supervisors updated Board Policy A-54, “Public Access to County Records,” directing the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors to establish a centralized Public Records Act Unit. This unit, staffed with two Administrative Analysts who are supervised by a Group Program Manager, serves as the main point of contact for the public to request records and coordinates with County departments to provide timely responses to PRA requests. The County also implemented a software solution allowing the public to submit requests and assisting staff in managing and routing requests. The County currently processes PRA requests through an online portal called NextRequest which requires the County to provide requestors an initial response within the required ten calendar days. These responses acknowledge requests while County staff determines if responsive and disclosable records exist. However, once a PRA request is received, it is often sent to the various County departments and staff expected to have responsive records. This process allows for differing interpretations and practices by the numerous PRA coordinators designated by their departments to oversee PRA request responses.

Since launching the online Public Records Request Center (<https://pra.sandiegocounty.gov/>), the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors has coordinated responses to 12,707 requests. Of those, 10,036 requests were fulfilled within 10 days. However, many of those requests were for single documents that only involve one department or function. The County has continued to receive a higher volume of complex requests that involve multiple departments and subject matter experts.

**SUBJECT: ESTABLISHING A FULLY STANDARDIZED PUBLIC RECORDS ACT
REQUEST REVIEW, DOCUMENT COMPILATION AND RESPONSE
PROCESS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

Establishing a standardized process for complex requests could improve response times for requests.

Other jurisdictions have already demonstrated the value of adopting fully standardized approaches to PRA management. For example, the California State Legislature utilizes a standard centralized process to intake, review, and respond to PRA requests for its 120 members of the Assembly and Senate. While such systems enhance organization and improve the document delivery process, they also ensure that timely coordination remains an important factor in overall compliance. This underscores the potential benefits of a standardized framework while reinforcing the need for clear internal processes and consistent accountability measures to enhance effectiveness.

To ensure consistent County responses to PRA requests, I recommend that the Board direct staff to update Board Policy A-54 to establish a fully standardized PRA request review, document compilation and response process designed to improve efficiency, consistency, transparency, and compliance with statutory requirements. Under the proposed framework, all PRA requests received by the County would be routed to the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors and the County Technology Office, where requests would be logged, tracked, and assigned appropriate deadlines to ensure adherence to the timelines set forth in the California Public Records Act. The Technology Office would be responsible for initiating the records search and compilation of responsive electronic records across relevant systems and departments, creating a more streamlined and organized process for handling PRA requests. Responsible departments would still be required to conduct a review of any paper records.

Following the initial collection and processing of records, potentially responsive materials compiled by the Technology Office would be forwarded to a designated reviewing authority, such as County Counsel, to evaluate the records and determine what information is subject to disclosure. These evaluations would include any necessary redactions or withholdings of exempted records. After this review, coordination will occur with any departments associated with the PRA request prior to the release of records, ensuring consistency in decision-making and communication. Departments would then finalize and deliver the responsive records to the requestor in accordance with legal requirements.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

The recommendations to explore a centralized Public Records Act (PRA) request review and processing procedure support the County of San Diego's 2026-2031 Strategic Plan Community (Engagement and Communications) initiative by providing information that increases access for individuals and communities and by creating proactive communications that are accessible and transparent. Recommended actions also support the Sustainability (Economy) initiative by aligning the County's available resources with services to maintain fiscal stability and ensure long-term solvency.

Respectfully submitted,



SUBJECT: ESTABLISHING A FULLY STANDARDIZED PUBLIC RECORDS ACT
REQUEST REVIEW, DOCUMENT COMPILATION AND RESPONSE
PROCESS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

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Supervisor, Second District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A