1

27

GOVERNMENT RECORDS OMBUDSMAN AMENDMENTS

2024 GENERAL SESSION STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Anthony E. Loubet

•	Senate Sponsor: Curtis S. Bramble
2 3	LONG TITLE
4	General Description:
5	This bill modifies provisions relating to government records.
6	Highlighted Provisions:
7	This bill:
8	 modifies a provision relating to government records ombudsman mediation of disputes
9	between requesters and responders;
10	provides for an appeal of a fee waiver denial;
11	repeals language making the State Records Committee a necessary party to a petition
12	seeking judicial review of a decision of the State Records Committee;
13	requires the government records ombudsman to certify the conclusion of certain
14	mediations or to the lack of consent to mediation;
15	requires a notice of a decision on appeal affirming an access denial or a fee waiver
16	denial to include a statement relating to the requester's right to request mediation; and
17	 suspends a requester's time to file a notice of appeal for a specified time if the requester
18	has requested mediation.
19	Money Appropriated in this Bill:
20	None
21	Other Special Clauses:
22	None
23	Utah Code Sections Affected:
24	AMENDS:
25	63A-12-111, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2019, Chapter 254
26	63G-2-401 , as last amended by Laws of Utah 2019, Chapters 254, 334

63G-2-402, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2019, Chapter 254

28	63G-2-403, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2019, Chapter 254
29	63G-2-404, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2023, Chapter 516
30	
31	Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:
32	Section 1. Section 63A-12-111 is amended to read:
33	63A-12-111 . Government records ombudsman.
34	(1) (a) The director of the division shall appoint a government records ombudsman.
35	(b) The government records ombudsman may not be a member of the State Records
36	Committee created in Section 63G-2-501.
37	(2) (a) The government records ombudsman shall:
38	[(a)] (i) be familiar with the provisions of Title 63G, Chapter 2, Government Records
39	Access and Management Act;
40	[(b)] (ii) serve as a resource for a person who is making or responding to a records
41	request or filing an appeal relating to a records request;
42	[(e) upon request, attempt to mediate disputes between requestors and responders;
43	and]
44	(iii) upon a request from a requester or responder, and with the consent of both the
45	requester and responder, mediate a dispute between a requester and responder,
46	including a dispute between a requester and a governmental entity regarding the
47	governmental entity's access denial, as defined in Section 63G-2-400.5; and
48	[(d)] (iv) on an annual basis, electronically transmit a written report to the
49	Government Operations Interim Committee on the work performed by the
50	government records ombudsman during the previous year.
51	(b) (i) Before the conclusion of a mediation under Subsection (2)(a)(iii), a requester
52	or responder may withdraw consent for the mediation.
53	(ii) If a requester or responder withdraws consent under Subsection (2)(b)(i), the
54	government records ombudsman shall certify, as provided in Subsection (4)(a)(ii),
55	that the mediation was not concluded because of a lack of the required consent.
56	(3) The government records ombudsman may not testify, or be compelled to testify, before
57	the State Records Committee created in Section 63G-2-501, another administrative
58	body, or a court regarding a matter that the government records ombudsman provided
59	services in relation to under this section.
60	(4) Upon the conclusion of a mediation under Subsection (2)(a)(iii) or upon the government
61	records ombudsman's determination that the required consent for the mediation is

62	lacking, the government records ombudsman shall:
63	(a) certify in writing that the mediation:
64	(i) is concluded; or
65	(ii) did not take place or was not concluded because of a lack of the required consent;
66	<u>and</u>
67	(b) provide a copy of the written certification to the requester and the responder.
68	Section 2. Section 63G-2-401 is amended to read:
69	63G-2-401. Appeal to chief administrative officer Notice of the decision of the
70	appeal.
71	(1) (a) A requester or interested party may appeal an access denial or the denial of a fee
72	waiver under Subsection 63G-2-203(4) to the chief administrative officer of the
73	governmental entity by filing a notice of appeal with the chief administrative officer
74	within 30 days after:
75	(i) for an access denial:
76	(A) the governmental entity sends a notice of denial under Section 63G-2-205, if
77	the governmental entity denies a record request under Subsection 63G-2-205
78	(1); or
79	[(ii)] (B) the record request is considered denied under Subsection 63G-2-204(9),
80	if that subsection applies[-] ; or
81	(ii) for a denial of a fee waiver, the date the governmental entity notifies the requester
82	that the fee waiver is denied.
83	(b) If a governmental entity claims extraordinary circumstances and specifies the date
84	when the records will be available under Subsection 63G-2-204(4), and, if the
85	requester believes the extraordinary circumstances do not exist or that the date
86	specified is unreasonable, the requester may appeal the governmental entity's claim
87	of extraordinary circumstances or date for compliance to the chief administrative
88	officer by filing a notice of appeal with the chief administrative officer within 30
89	days after notification of a claim of extraordinary circumstances by the governmental
90	entity, despite the lack of a "determination" or its equivalent under Subsection
91	63G-2-204(9).
92	(2) A notice of appeal shall contain:
93	(a) the name, mailing address, and daytime telephone number of the requester or
94	interested party; and
95	(b) the relief sought.

96 (3) The requester or interested party may file a short statement of facts, reasons, and legal authority in support of the appeal.

98 (4) (a) If the appeal involves a record that is the subject of a business confidentiality claim under Section 63G-2-309, the chief administrative officer shall:

- (i) send notice of the appeal to the business confidentiality claimant within three business days after receiving notice, except that if notice under this section must be given to more than 35 persons, it shall be given as soon as reasonably possible; and
- (ii) send notice of the business confidentiality claim and the schedule for the chief administrative officer's determination to the requester or interested party within three business days after receiving notice of the appeal.
- (b) The business confidentiality claimant shall have seven business days after notice is sent by the administrative officer to submit further support for the claim of business confidentiality.
- (5) (a) The chief administrative officer shall make a decision on the appeal within:
 - (i) (A) 10 business days after the chief administrative officer's receipt of the notice of appeal; or
 - (B) five business days after the chief administrative officer's receipt of the notice of appeal, if the requester or interested party demonstrates that an expedited decision benefits the public rather than the requester or interested party; or
 - (ii) 12 business days after the governmental entity sends the notice of appeal to a person who submitted a claim of business confidentiality.
 - (b) (i) If the chief administrative officer fails to make a decision on an appeal of an access denial within the time specified in Subsection (5)(a), the failure is the equivalent of a decision affirming the access denial.
 - (ii) If the chief administrative officer fails to make a decision on an appeal under Subsection (1)(b) within the time specified in Subsection (5)(a), the failure is the equivalent of a decision affirming the claim of extraordinary circumstances or the reasonableness of the date specified when the records will be available.
 - (c) The provisions of this section notwithstanding, the parties participating in the proceeding may, by agreement, extend the time periods specified in this section.
- (6) Except as provided in Section 63G-2-406, the chief administrative officer may, upon consideration and weighing of the various interests and public policies pertinent to the classification and disclosure or nondisclosure, order the disclosure of information

130	properly classified as private under Subsection 63G-2-302(2) or protected under Section
131	63G-2-305 if the interests favoring access are greater than or equal to the interests
132	favoring restriction of access.
133	(7) (a) The governmental entity shall send written notice of the chief administrative
134	officer's decision to all participants.
135	(b) If the chief administrative officer's decision is to affirm the access denial in whole or
136	in part or to affirm the fee waiver denial, the notice under Subsection (7)(a) shall
137	include:
138	(i) a statement that the requester has a right under Section 63A-12-111 to request the
139	government records ombudsman to mediate the dispute between the requester and
140	the governmental entity concerning the access denial or the fee waiver denial;
141	[(i)] (ii) a statement that the requester or interested party has the right to appeal the
142	decision, as provided in Section 63G-2-402, to:
143	(A) the State Records Committee or district court; or
144	(B) the local appeals board, if the governmental entity is a political subdivision
145	and the governmental entity has established a local appeals board;
146	[(iii)] (iii) the time limits for filing an appeal described in Subsection (7)(b)(ii),
147	including an explanation of a suspension of the time limits, as provided in
148	Subsections 63G-2-403(1)(c) and 63G-2-404(1)(b), for a requester if the requester
149	seeks mediation under Section 63A-12-111; and
150	[(iii)] (iv) the name and business address of:
151	(A) the executive secretary of the State Records Committee; [and]
152	(B) the individual designated as the contact individual for the appeals board, if the
153	governmental entity is a political subdivision that has established an appeals
154	board under Subsection 63G-2-701(5)(c)[τ] : and
155	(C) the government records ombudsman.
156	(8) A person aggrieved by a governmental entity's classification or designation
157	determination under this chapter, but who is not requesting access to the records, may
158	appeal that determination using the procedures provided in this section. If a
159	nonrequester is the only appellant, the procedures provided in this section shall apply,
160	except that the decision on the appeal shall be made within 30 days after receiving the
161	notice of appeal.
162	(9) The duties of the chief administrative officer under this section may be delegated.
163	Section 3 Section 63G-2-402 is amended to read:

164		63G-2-402. Appealing a decision of a chief administrative officer.
165	(1)	If the decision of the chief administrative officer of a governmental entity under Section
166		63G-2-401 is to affirm the denial of a record request or to affirm the denial of a fee
167		waiver, the requester may:
168		(a) (i) appeal the decision to the State Records Committee, as provided in Section
169		63G-2-403; or
170		(ii) petition for judicial review of the decision in district court, as provided in Section
171		63G-2-404; [or]
172		(b) seek mediation of the access denial or fee waiver denial under Subsection
173		63A-12-111(2)(c); or
174		[(b)] (c) appeal the decision to the local appeals board if:
175		(i) the decision is of a chief administrative officer of a governmental entity that is a
176		political subdivision; and
177		(ii) the political subdivision has established a local appeals board.
178	(2)	A requester who appeals a chief administrative officer's decision to the State Records
179		Committee or a local appeals board does not lose or waive the right to seek judicial
180		review of the decision of the State Records Committee or local appeals board.
181	(3)	As provided in Section 63G-2-403, an interested party may appeal to the State Records
182		Committee a chief administrative officer's decision under Section 63G-2-401 affirming
183		an access denial.
184		Section 4. Section 63G-2-403 is amended to read:
185		63G-2-403 . Appeals to the State Records Committee.
186	(1)	(a) A records committee appellant appeals to the State Records Committee by filing
187		a notice of appeal with the executive secretary of the State Records Committee no
188		later than 30 days after the date of issuance of the decision being appealed.
189		(b) Notwithstanding Subsection (1)(a), a requester may file a notice of appeal with the
190		executive secretary of the State Records Committee no later than 45 days after the
191		day on which the record request is made if:
192		(i) the circumstances described in Subsection 63G-2-401(1)(b) occur; and
193		(ii) the chief administrative officer fails to make a decision under Section 63G-2-401.
194		(c) The time for a requester to file a notice of appeal under Subsection (1)(a) or (b) is
195		suspended for the period of time that:
196		(i) begins the date the requester submits a request under Section 63A-12-111 for the
197		government records ombudsman to mediate the dispute between the requester and

198	the governmental entity; and
199	(ii) ends the earlier of the following dates:
200	(A) the date that the government records ombudsman certifies in writing that the
201	mediation is concluded; or
202	(B) the date that the government records ombudsman certifies in writing that the
203	mediation did not occur or was not concluded because of a lack of the required
204	consent.
205	(2) The notice of appeal shall:
206	(a) contain the name, mailing address, and daytime telephone number of the records
207	committee appellant;
208	(b) be accompanied by a copy of the decision being appealed; and
209	(c) state the relief sought.
210	(3) The records committee appellant:
211	(a) shall, on the day on which the notice of appeal is filed with the State Records
212	Committee, serve a copy of the notice of appeal on:
213	(i) the governmental entity whose access denial or fee waiver denial is the subject of
214	the appeal, if the records committee appellant is a requester or interested party; or
215	(ii) the requester or interested party who is a party to the local appeals board
216	proceeding that resulted in the decision that the political subdivision is appealing
217	to the committee, if the records committee appellant is a political subdivision; and
218	(b) may file a short statement of facts, reasons, and legal authority in support of the
219	appeal.
220	(4) (a) Except as provided in Subsections (4)(b) and (c), no later than seven business
221	days after receiving a notice of appeal, the executive secretary of the State Records
222	Committee shall:
223	(i) schedule a hearing for the State Records Committee to discuss the appeal at the
224	next regularly scheduled committee meeting falling at least 16 days after the date
225	the notice of appeal is filed but no longer than 64 calendar days after the date the
226	notice of appeal was filed except that the committee may schedule an expedited
227	hearing upon application of the records committee appellant and good cause
228	shown;
229	(ii) send a copy of the notice of hearing to the records committee appellant; and
230	(iii) send a copy of the notice of appeal, supporting statement, and a notice of hearing
231	to:

232	(A) each member of the State Records Committee;
233	(B) the records officer and the chief administrative officer of the governmental
234	entity whose access denial is the subject of the appeal, if the records committee
235	appellant is a requester or interested party;
236	(C) any person who made a business confidentiality claim under Section
237	63G-2-309 for a record that is the subject of the appeal; and
238	(D) all persons who participated in the proceedings before the governmental
239	entity's chief administrative officer, if the appeal is of the chief administrative
240	officer's decision affirming an access denial.
241	(b) (i) The executive secretary of the State Records Committee may decline to
242	schedule a hearing if the record series that is the subject of the appeal has been
243	found by the committee in a previous hearing involving the same governmental
244	entity to be appropriately classified as private, controlled, or protected.
245	(ii) (A) If the executive secretary of the State Records Committee declines to
246	schedule a hearing, the executive secretary shall send a notice to the records
247	committee appellant indicating that the request for hearing has been denied and
248	the reason for the denial.
249	(B) The State Records Committee shall make rules to implement this section as
250	provided by Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act.
251	(c) The executive secretary of the State Records Committee may schedule a hearing on
252	an appeal to the State Records Committee at a regularly scheduled State Records
253	Committee meeting that is later than the period described in Subsection (4)(a)(i) if
254	that committee meeting is the first regularly scheduled State Records Committee
255	meeting at which there are fewer than 10 appeals scheduled to be heard.
256	(5) (a) No later than five business days before the hearing, a governmental entity shall
257	submit to the executive secretary of the State Records Committee a written statement
258	of facts, reasons, and legal authority in support of the governmental entity's position.
259	(b) The governmental entity shall send a copy of the written statement by first class
260	mail, postage prepaid, to the requester or interested party involved in the appeal. The
261	executive secretary shall forward a copy of the written statement to each member of
262	the State Records Committee.
263	(6) (a) No later than 10 business days after the day on which the executive secretary
264	sends the notice of appeal, a person whose legal interests may be substantially
265	affected by the proceeding may file a request for intervention with the State Records

266	Committee.
267	(b) Any written statement of facts, reasons, and legal authority in support of the
268	intervener's position shall be filed with the request for intervention.
269	(c) The person seeking intervention shall provide copies of the statement described in
270	Subsection (6)(b) to all parties to the proceedings before the State Records
271	Committee.
272	(7) The State Records Committee shall hold a hearing within the period of time described in
273	Subsection (4).
274	(8) At the hearing, the State Records Committee shall allow the parties to testify, present
275	evidence, and comment on the issues. The committee may allow other interested
276	persons to comment on the issues.
277	(9) (a) (i) The State Records Committee:
278	(A) may review the disputed records; and
279	(B) shall review the disputed records, if the committee is weighing the various
280	interests under Subsection (11).
281	(ii) A review of the disputed records under Subsection (9)(a)(i) shall be in camera.
282	(b) Members of the State Records Committee may not disclose any information or
283	record reviewed by the committee in camera unless the disclosure is otherwise
284	authorized by this chapter.
285	(10) (a) Discovery is prohibited, but the State Records Committee may issue subpoenas
286	or other orders to compel production of necessary evidence.
287	(b) When the subject of a State Records Committee subpoena disobeys or fails to
288	comply with the subpoena, the committee may file a motion for an order to compel
289	obedience to the subpoena with the district court.
290	(c) (i) The State Records Committee's review shall be de novo, if the appeal is an
291	appeal from a decision of a chief administrative officer:
292	(A) issued under Section 63G-2-401; or
293	(B) issued by a chief administrative officer of a political subdivision that has not
294	established a local appeals board.
295	(ii) For an appeal from a decision of a local appeals board, the State Records
296	Committee shall review and consider the decision of the local appeals board.
297	(11) (a) No later than seven business days after the hearing, the State Records
298	Committee shall issue a signed order:
299	(i) granting the relief sought, in whole or in part; or

300 (ii) upholding the governmental entity's access denial, in whole or in part. 301 (b) Except as provided in Section 63G-2-406, the State Records Committee may, upon 302 consideration and weighing of the various interests and public policies pertinent to 303 the classification and disclosure or nondisclosure, order the disclosure of information 304 properly classified as private, controlled, or protected if the public interest favoring 305 access is greater than or equal to the interest favoring restriction of access. 306 (c) In making a determination under Subsection (11)(b), the State Records Committee 307 shall consider and, where appropriate, limit the requester's or interested party's use 308 and further disclosure of the record in order to protect: 309 (i) privacy interests in the case of a private or controlled record; 310 (ii) business confidentiality interests in the case of a record protected under 311 Subsection 63G-2-305(1), (2), (40)(a)(ii), or (40)(a)(vi); and 312 (iii) privacy interests or the public interest in the case of other protected records. 313 (12) The order of the State Records Committee shall include: 314 (a) a statement of reasons for the decision, including citations to this chapter, court rule 315 or order, another state statute, federal statute, or federal regulation that governs 316 disclosure of the record, if the citations do not disclose private, controlled, or 317 protected information; 318 (b) a description of the record or portions of the record to which access was ordered or 319 denied, if the description does not disclose private, controlled, or protected 320 information or information exempt from disclosure under Subsection 63G-2-201 321 (3)(b);322 (c) a statement that any party to the proceeding before the State Records Committee may 323 appeal the committee's decision to district court; and 324 (d) a brief summary of the appeals process, the time limits for filing an appeal, and a 325 notice that in order to protect its rights on appeal, the party may wish to seek advice 326 from an attorney. 327 (13) If the State Records Committee fails to issue a decision within 73 calendar days of the 328 filing of the notice of appeal, that failure is the equivalent of an order denying the 329 appeal. A records committee appellant shall notify the State Records Committee in 330 writing if the records committee appellant considers the appeal denied. 331 (14) A party to a proceeding before the State Records Committee may seek judicial review

order as provided in Section 63G-2-404.

in district court of a State Records Committee order by filing a petition for review of the

332

333

334	(15) (a) Unless a notice of intent to appeal is filed under Subsection (15)(b), each party
335	to the proceeding shall comply with the order of the State Records Committee.
336	(b) If a party disagrees with the order of the State Records Committee, that party may
337	file a notice of intent to appeal the order.
338	(c) If the State Records Committee orders the governmental entity to produce a record
339	and no appeal is filed, or if, as a result of the appeal, the governmental entity is
340	required to produce a record, the governmental entity shall:
341	(i) produce the record; and
342	(ii) file a notice of compliance with the committee.
343	(d) (i) If the governmental entity that is ordered to produce a record fails to file a
344	notice of compliance or a notice of intent to appeal, the State Records Committee
345	may do either or both of the following:
346	(A) impose a civil penalty of up to \$500 for each day of continuing
347	noncompliance; or
348	(B) send written notice of the governmental entity's noncompliance to the
349	governor.
350	(ii) In imposing a civil penalty, the State Records Committee shall consider the
351	gravity and circumstances of the violation, including whether the failure to
352	comply was due to neglect or was willful or intentional.
353	Section 5. Section 63G-2-404 is amended to read:
354	63G-2-404 . Judicial review.
355	(1) (a) A petition for judicial review of an order or decision, as allowed under this part,
356	in Section 63G-2-209, or in Subsection 63G-2-701(6)(a)(ii), shall be filed no later
357	than 30 days after the date of the order or decision, subject to Subsection (1)(b).
358	(b) The time for a requester to file a petition for judicial review under Subsection (1)(a)
359	is suspended for the period of time that:
360	(i) begins the date the requester submits a request under Section 63A-12-111 for the
361	government records ombudsman to mediate the dispute between the requester and
362	the governmental entity; and
363	(ii) ends the earlier of the following dates:
364	(A) the date that the government records ombudsman certifies in writing that the
365	mediation is concluded; or
366	(B) the date that the government records ombudsman certifies in writing that the
367	mediation did not occur or was not concluded because of a lack of the required

368	<u>consent.</u>
369	[(b) The State Records Committee is a necessary party to a petition for judicial review
370	of a State Records Committee order.]
371	[(e) The executive secretary of the State Records Committee shall be served with notice
372	of a petition for judicial review of a State Records Committee order, in accordance
373	with the Utah Rules of Civil Procedure.]
374	(2) (a) A petition for judicial review is a complaint governed by the Utah Rules of Civil
375	Procedure and shall contain:
376	(i) the petitioner's name and mailing address;
377	(ii) a copy of the State Records Committee order from which the appeal is taken, if
378	the petitioner is seeking judicial review of an order of the State Records
379	Committee;
380	(iii) the name and mailing address of the governmental entity that issued the initial
381	determination with a copy of that determination;
382	(iv) a request for relief specifying the type and extent of relief requested; and
383	(v) a statement of the reasons why the petitioner is entitled to relief.
384	(b) Except in exceptional circumstances, a petition for judicial review may not raise an
385	issue that was not raised in the underlying appeal and order.
386	(3) If the appeal is based on the denial of access to a protected record based on a claim of
387	business confidentiality, the court shall allow the claimant of business confidentiality to
388	provide to the court the reasons for the claim of business confidentiality.
389	(4) All additional pleadings and proceedings in the district court are governed by the Utah
390	Rules of Civil Procedure.
391	(5) The district court may review the disputed records. The review shall be in camera.
392	(6) (a) The court shall:
393	(i) make the court's decision de novo, but, for a petition seeking judicial review of a
394	State Records Committee order, allow introduction of evidence presented to the
395	State Records Committee;
396	(ii) determine all questions of fact and law without a jury; and
397	(iii) decide the issue at the earliest practical opportunity.
398	(b) A court may remand a petition for judicial review to the State Records Committee if:
399	(i) the remand is to allow the State Records Committee to decide an issue that:
400	(A) involves access to a record; and
401	(B) the State Records Committee has not previously addressed in the proceeding

402	that led to the petition for judicial review; and
103	(ii) the court determines that remanding to the State Records Committee is in the best
104	interests of justice.
105	(7) (a) Except as provided in Section 63G-2-406, the court may, upon consideration and
406	weighing of the various interests and public policies pertinent to the classification
407	and disclosure or nondisclosure, order the disclosure of information properly
408	classified as private, controlled, or protected if the interest favoring access is greater
109	than or equal to the interest favoring restriction of access.
410	(b) The court shall consider and, where appropriate, limit the requester's use and further
411	disclosure of the record in order to protect privacy interests in the case of private or
412	controlled records, business confidentiality interests in the case of records protected
413	under Subsections 63G-2-305(1) and (2), and privacy interests or the public interest
414	in the case of other protected records.
415	Section 6. Effective date.
416	This bill takes effect on May 1, 2024.