

HOUSE BILL NO. 1286

Introduced by

Representatives Devlin, Froseth, Glassheim

Senators Andrist, Trenbeath, Triplett

1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new subsection to section 44-04-18.10 and a new
2 subsection to section 44-04-19.2 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the release of
3 confidential records disclosed to another entity and the sequestering of competitors in a
4 competitive selection or hiring process; and to amend and reenact subsection 2 of section
5 28-32-33, subsection 6 of section 39-08-13, subsection 8 of section 44-04-17.1, section
6 44-04-18, subsection 2 of section 44-04-18.1, sections 44-04-18.4, 44-04-18.12, and
7 44-04-19.1, subsections 5 and 6 of section 44-04-20, and section 44-04-21.1 of the North
8 Dakota Century Code, relating to discovery in adjudicative proceedings, providing copies of
9 records, fees for copies, release of bidding records, litigation and investigatory records, meeting
10 notices, and violations.

11 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

12 **SECTION 1. AMENDMENT.** Subsection 2 of section 28-32-33 of the North Dakota
13 Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

14 2. In an adjudicative proceeding, a party must first show good cause, by written
15 petition, and get the written approval of the hearing officer before obtaining
16 discovery from an administrative agency. ~~Before obtaining discovery from an~~
17 ~~administrative agency by means of a request for the production of documents that~~
18 ~~are public records, the requesting party must have first made a diligent and~~
19 ~~good faith effort to review the documents under existing general law procedures for~~
20 ~~the inspection of public records and access must have been denied.~~

21 **SECTION 2. AMENDMENT.** Subsection 6 of section 39-08-13 of the North Dakota
22 Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

23 6. Upon request of any person and upon payment of a fee of two dollars, the director
24 or the law enforcement agency may furnish to a requestor a copy of that portion of

1 an investigating officer's accident report which does not disclose the opinion of the
2 reporting officer, if the report shows that the accident is one for which a driver is
3 required to file a report under section 39-08-09.

4 **SECTION 3. AMENDMENT.** Subsection 8 of section 44-04-17.1 of the North Dakota
5 Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

6 8. a. "Meeting" means a formal or informal gathering, whether in person or through
7 ~~either~~ electronic means such as telephone or video conference, of:

8 (1) A quorum of the members of the governing body of a public entity
9 regarding public business; or

10 (2) Less than a quorum of the members of the governing body of a public
11 entity regarding public business, if the members attending one or more
12 of such smaller gatherings collectively constitute a quorum and if the
13 members hold the gathering for the purpose of avoiding the
14 requirements of section 44-04-19.

15 b. "Meeting" includes work sessions, but does not include chance or social
16 gatherings where public business is not considered and does not include the
17 attendance of members of a governing body at meetings of any national,
18 regional, or state association to which the public entity, the governing body, or
19 individual members belong.

20 c. Notwithstanding subdivisions a and b, as applied to the legislative assembly,
21 "meeting" means any gathering subject to section 14 of article IV of the
22 Constitution of North Dakota.

23 **SECTION 4. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-04-18 of the North Dakota Century Code is
24 amended and reenacted as follows:

25 **44-04-18. Access to public records - Electronically stored information.**

26 1. Except as otherwise specifically provided by law, all records of a public entity are
27 public records, open and accessible for inspection during reasonable office hours.
28 As used in this subsection, "reasonable office hours" includes all regular office
29 hours of a public entity. If a public entity does not have regular office hours, the
30 name and telephone number of a contact person authorized to provide access to
31 the public entity's records must be posted on the door of the office of the public

1 entity, if any. Otherwise, the information regarding the contact person must be filed
2 with the secretary of state for state-level entities, for public entities defined in
3 subdivision c of subsection 12 of section 44-04-17.1, the city auditor or designee of
4 the city for city-level entities, or the county auditor or designee of the county for
5 other entities.

6 2. Upon request for a copy of specific public records, any entity subject to
7 subsection 1 shall furnish the requester one copy of the public records requested.
8 A request need not be made in person or in writing, and the copy must be mailed
9 upon request. A public entity may charge up to fifteen cents per impression of a
10 paper copy. As used in this section, "paper copy" means a one-sided or two-sided
11 duplicated copy of a size not more than eight and one-half by fourteen inches. For
12 any copy of a record that is not a paper copy as defined in this section, the public
13 entity may charge a reasonable fee for making the copy. As used in this section,
14 "reasonable fee" means the actual cost to the public entity of making the copy,
15 including labor, materials, and equipment. The entity may charge a reasonable fee
16 for making or mailing the copy, or both for the actual cost of postage to mail a copy
17 of a record. An entity may require payment before making or mailing the copy, or
18 both. An entity may impose a fee not exceeding twenty-five dollars per hour per
19 request, excluding the initial hour, for locating records if locating the records
20 requires more than one hour. An entity may impose a fee not exceeding
21 twenty-five dollars per hour per request, excluding the initial hour, for excising
22 confidential or closed material under 44-04-18.10. If the entity is not authorized to
23 use the fees to cover the cost of providing or mailing the copy, or both, or if a copy
24 machine is not readily available, the entity may make arrangements for the copy to
25 be provided or mailed, or both, by another entity, public or private, and the
26 requester shall pay the fee to that other entity. ~~As used in this subsection,~~
27 ~~"reasonable fee" means the actual cost to the public entity of making or mailing a~~
28 ~~copy of a record, or both, including labor, materials, postage, and equipment, but~~
29 ~~excluding any cost associated with excising confidential or closed material under~~
30 ~~section 44-04-18.10. An entity may impose a fee not exceeding twenty-five dollars~~
31 ~~per hour per request, excluding the initial hour, for locating records if locating the~~

1 ~~records requires more than one hour.~~ This subsection does not apply to copies of
2 public records for which a different fee is specifically provided by law.

3 3. Access to electronically stored records is free if the records are recoverable
4 without the use of a computer backup. If a request is made for access to a record
5 on a backup, or for a copy of an electronically stored record, in addition to the
6 charge in this section, the public entity may charge a reasonable fee for providing
7 the copies, including costs attributable to the use of information technology
8 resources.

9 4. Except as provided in this subsection, nothing in this section requires a public
10 entity to create or compile a record that does not exist. Access to an electronically
11 stored record under this section, or a copy thereof, must be provided at the
12 requester's option in either a printed document or through any other available
13 medium. A computer file is not an available medium if no means exist to separate
14 or prevent the disclosure of any closed or confidential information contained in that
15 file. Except as reasonably necessary to reveal the organization of data contained
16 in an electronically stored record, a public entity is not required to provide an
17 electronically stored record in a different structure, format, or organization. This
18 section does not require a public entity to provide a requester with access to a
19 computer terminal.

20 4. 5. A state-level public entity as defined in subdivision a of subsection 12 of section
21 44-04-17.1 may establish procedures for providing access from an outside location
22 to any computer data base or electronically filed or stored information maintained
23 by that entity. The procedures must address the measures that are necessary to
24 maintain the confidentiality of information protected by federal or state law. Except
25 for access provided to another state-level public entity, the entity may charge a
26 reasonable fee for providing that outside access. If the original information is
27 keyed, entered, provided, compiled, or submitted by any political subdivision, the
28 fees must be shared by the state and the political subdivision based on their
29 proportional costs to make the data available.

30 5. 6. Any request under this section for records in the possession of a public entity by a
31 party to a criminal or civil action or adversarial administrative proceeding in which

1 the public entity is a party, or by an agent of the party, must comply with applicable
2 discovery rules and be made to the attorney representing that entity in the criminal
3 or civil action or adversarial administrative proceeding. The public entity may deny
4 a request from a party or an agent of a party under this subsection if the request
5 seeks records that are privileged under applicable discovery rules.

6 ~~6.~~ 7. A denial of a request for records made under this section must describe the legal
7 authority for the denial and must be in writing if requested.

8 ~~7.~~ 8. This section is violated when a person's right to review or receive a copy of a
9 record that is not exempt or confidential is denied or unreasonably delayed or
10 when a fee is charged in excess of the amount authorized in subsection 2.

11 ~~8.~~ 9. It is not an unreasonable delay or a denial of access under this section to withhold
12 from the public a record that is prepared at the express direction of, and for
13 presentation to, a governing body until the record is mailed or otherwise provided
14 to a member of the body or until the next meeting of the body, whichever occurs
15 first. It also is not an unreasonable delay or a denial of access to withhold from the
16 public a working paper or preliminary draft until a final draft is completed, the
17 record is distributed to a member of a governing body or discussed by the body at
18 an open meeting, or work is discontinued on the draft but no final version has been
19 prepared, whichever occurs first.

20 10. For public entities headed by a single individual, it is not an unreasonable delay or
21 a denial of access to withhold from the public a working paper or preliminary draft
22 until a final draft is completed, or work is discontinued on the draft but no final
23 version has been prepared, whichever occurs first. A working paper or preliminary
24 draft shall be deemed completed if it can reasonably be concluded, upon a good
25 faith review, that all substantive work on it has been completed.

26 ~~9.~~ 11. A disclosure of a requested record under this section is not a waiver of any
27 copyright held by the public entity in the requested record or of any applicable
28 evidentiary privilege.

29 **SECTION 5. AMENDMENT.** Subsection 2 of section 44-04-18.1 of the North Dakota
30 Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

- 1 2. Except as otherwise specifically provided by law, personal information regarding a
2 public employee contained in an employee's personnel record or given to the state
3 or a political subdivision by the employee in the course of employment is exempt.
4 As used in this section, "personal information" means a person's home address;
5 home telephone number; photograph; medical information; motor vehicle
6 operator's identification number; payroll deduction information; the name, address,
7 telephone number, and date of birth of any dependent or emergency contact; any
8 credit, debit, or electronic fund transfer card number; and any account number at a
9 bank or other financial institution.

10 **SECTION 6. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-04-18.4 of the North Dakota Century Code is
11 amended and reenacted as follows:

12 **44-04-18.4. Confidentiality of trade secret, proprietary, commercial, and financial**
13 **information.**

- 14 1. Trade secret, proprietary, commercial, and financial information is confidential if it
15 is of a privileged nature and it has not been previously publicly disclosed.
- 16 2. "Trade secret" includes:
- 17 a. A computer software program and components of a computer software
18 program which are subject to a copyright or a patent, and any formula,
19 pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique, or process supplied
20 to any state agency, institution, department, or board which is the subject of
21 efforts by the supplying person or organization to maintain its secrecy and that
22 may derive independent economic value, actual or potential, from not being
23 generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable by proper means by,
24 other persons or organizations that might obtain economic value from its
25 disclosure or use; and
- 26 b. A discovery or innovation which is subject to a patent or a copyright, and any
27 formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique, or process
28 supplied to or prepared by any public entity which is the subject of efforts by
29 the supplying or preparing entity, person, business, or industry to maintain its
30 secrecy and that may derive independent economic value, actual or potential,
31 from not being generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable by

- 1 proper means by, any person who might obtain economic value from its
2 disclosure or use.
- 3 3. "Proprietary information" includes information received from a sponsor of research
4 conducted by a public entity, as well as any discovery or innovation generated by
5 that research, technical, financial, and marketing information and other documents
6 related to the commercialization, and any other discovery or innovation produced
7 by the public entity which an employee or the entity intends to commercialize.
- 8 4. This section does not limit or otherwise affect a record pertaining to any rule of the
9 state department of health or to any record pertaining to the application for a permit
10 or license necessary to do business or to expand business operations within this
11 state, except as otherwise provided by law.
- 12 5. Unless made confidential under subsection 1, the following economic development
13 records and information are exempt:
- 14 a. Records and information pertaining to a prospective location of a business or
15 industry, including the identity, nature, and location of the business or
16 industry, when no previous public disclosure has been made by the business
17 or industry of the interest or intent of the business or industry to locate in,
18 relocate within, or expand within this state. This exemption does not include
19 records pertaining to the application for permits or licenses necessary to do
20 business or to expand business operations within this state, except as
21 otherwise provided by law.
- 22 b. Trade secrets and commercial or financial information received from a person,
23 business, or industry that is interested in or is applying for or receiving
24 financing or technical assistance, or other forms of business assistance.
- 25 6. Unless made confidential under subsection 1 or made exempt under subsection 5,
26 bids or proposals received by a public entity in response to a request for proposals
27 by the public entity are exempt until such time all of the proposals have been
28 received and opened by the public entity or until such time that all oral
29 presentations regarding the proposals, if any, have been heard by the public entity.
30 Records included with any bid or proposal naming and generally describing the
31 entity submitting the proposal shall be open.

1 **SECTION 7.** A new subsection to section 44-04-18.10 of the North Dakota Century
2 Code is created and enacted as follows:

3 Confidential records that are authorized by law to be disclosed to another entity
4 continue to be confidential in the possession of the receiving entity, except as
5 otherwise provided by law.

6 **SECTION 8. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-04-18.12 of the North Dakota Century Code is
7 amended and reenacted as follows:

8 **44-04-18.12. Cooperative investigations and litigation.** A record acquired ~~under an~~
9 ~~agreement between or involving~~ by the office of attorney general from a governmental agency
10 ~~in another jurisdiction and the attorney general or a nonpublic entity is confidential, except for~~
11 ~~the purposes specified in the agreement,~~ exempt if the attorney general determines:

- 12 1. The record is necessary to monitor or enforce compliance with a law or order or to
13 further a civil investigation or litigation by the state;
- 14 2. ~~The record can be obtained only by agreeing to keep the record confidential; and~~
- 15 3. The record is treated as confidential or privileged by the provider of the records;
16 and
- 17 3. The provider of the records has not agreed to waive the privilege relating to or
18 confidentiality of the record.

19 **SECTION 9. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-04-19.1 of the North Dakota Century Code is
20 amended and reenacted as follows:

21 **44-04-19.1. Open records and open meetings - Exemptions for attorney work**
22 **product, attorney consultation, and negotiation preparation.**

- 23 1. Attorney work product is exempt from section 44-04-18. Attorney work product and
24 copies thereof shall not be open to public inspection, examination, or copying
25 unless specifically made public by the public entity receiving such work product.
- 26 2. Attorney consultation is exempt from section 44-04-19. That portion of a meeting
27 of a governing body during which an attorney consultation occurs may be closed
28 by the governing body under section 44-04-19.2.
- 29 3. Active investigatory work product is exempt from section 44-04-18.
- 30 4. "Attorney work product" means any document or record that:

- 1 a. Was prepared by an attorney representing a public entity or prepared at such
2 an attorney's express direction;
- 3 b. Reflects a mental impression, conclusion, litigation strategy, or legal theory of
4 that attorney or the entity; and
- 5 c. Was prepared exclusively for civil or criminal litigation, for adversarial
6 administrative proceedings, or in anticipation of reasonably predictable civil or
7 criminal litigation or adversarial administrative proceedings.
- 8 ~~4.~~ 5. "Attorney consultation" means any discussion between a governing body and its
9 attorney in instances in which the governing body seeks or receives the attorney's
10 advice regarding and in anticipation of reasonably predictable civil or criminal
11 litigation or adversarial administrative proceedings or concerning pending civil or
12 criminal litigation or pending adversarial administrative proceedings. Mere
13 presence or participation of an attorney at a meeting is not sufficient to constitute
14 attorney consultation.
- 15 6. "Investigatory work product" means records obtained, compiled, or prepared by a
16 public entity in an effort to monitor and enforce compliance with the law or an
17 order. Investigatory work product must be considered active as long as it is related
18 to monitoring or enforcement activity conducted with a reasonable good-faith belief
19 that it will lead to enforcement of the law or an order.
- 20 ~~5.~~ 7. "Adversarial administrative proceedings" include only those administrative
21 proceedings where the administrative agency or institution of higher education acts
22 as a complainant, respondent, or decisionmaker in an adverse administrative
23 proceeding. This term does not refer to those instances where the administrative
24 agency or institution acts in its own rulemaking capacity.
- 25 ~~6.~~ 8. Following the final completion of the civil or criminal litigation or the adversarial
26 administrative proceeding, including the exhaustion of all appellate remedies,
27 attorney work product must be made available for public disclosure by the public
28 entity, unless another exception to section 44-04-18 applies or if disclosure would
29 have an adverse fiscal effect on the conduct or settlement of other pending or
30 reasonably predictable civil or criminal litigation or adversarial administrative

1 proceedings, or the attorney work product reflects mental impressions, opinions,
2 conclusions, or legal theories regarding potential liability of a public entity.

3 ~~7.~~ 9. A governing body may hold an executive session under section 44-04-19.2 to
4 discuss negotiating strategy or provide negotiating instructions to its attorney or
5 other negotiator regarding litigation, adversarial administrative proceedings, or
6 contracts, which are currently being negotiated or for which negotiation is
7 reasonably likely to occur in the immediate future. An executive session may be
8 held under this subsection only when an open meeting would have an adverse
9 fiscal effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public entity.

10 ~~8.~~ 10. Nothing in this section may be construed to waive any attorney-client privilege of a
11 public entity as defined in subdivision c of subsection 12 of section 44-04-17.1
12 regarding matters that do not pertain to public business.

13 **SECTION 10.** A new subsection to section 44-04-19.2 of the North Dakota Century
14 Code is created and enacted as follows:

15 A public entity may sequester all competitors in a competitive selection or hiring
16 process from that portion of a public meeting wherein presentations are heard or
17 interviews are conducted.

18 **SECTION 11. AMENDMENT.** Subsections 5 and 6 of section 44-04-20 of the North
19 Dakota Century Code are amended and reenacted as follows:

20 5. The governing body's presiding officer has the responsibility of assuring that such
21 public notice is given at the same time as such governing body's members are
22 notified, and that this notice is available to anyone requesting such information.

23 When a request is made for notice of meetings, the request is effective for one
24 year unless a different time period is specified.

25 6. In the event of emergency or special meetings of a governing body, the person
26 calling such a meeting shall also notify the public entity's official newspaper, if any,
27 and any representatives of the news media which have requested to be so notified
28 of such special or emergency meetings, of the time, place, date, and topics to be
29 considered at the same time as such governing body's members are notified. If
30 the public entity does not have an official newspaper, then it must notify the official
31 newspaper of the county where its principal office or mailing address is located.

1 Topics that may be considered at an emergency or special meeting are limited to
2 those included in the notice.

3 **SECTION 12. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-04-21.1 of the North Dakota Century Code is
4 amended and reenacted as follows:

5 **44-04-21.1. Administrative review procedure.**

- 6 1. Any interested person may request an attorney general's opinion to review a
7 written denial of a request for records under section 44-04-18, a denial of access to
8 a meeting under section 44-04-19, or other alleged violation of section 44-04-18,
9 44-04-19, 44-04-19.2, 44-04-20, or 44-04-21 by any public entity other than the
10 legislative assembly or any committee thereof. A request made under this section
11 must be made within thirty days of the alleged violation, except that a request
12 based on allegations that a meeting occurred without the notice required by section
13 44-04-20, must be made within ninety days of the alleged violation. In preparing
14 an opinion under this section, the attorney general has discretion to obtain and
15 review a recording made under section 44-04-19.2. The attorney general may
16 request and obtain information claimed to be exempt or confidential for the purpose
17 of determining whether the information is exempt or confidential. Any such
18 information may not be released by the attorney general and may be returned to
19 the provider of the information. The attorney general shall issue to the public entity
20 involved an opinion on the alleged violation unless the request is withdrawn by the
21 person requesting the opinion or a civil action has been filed involving the possible
22 violation. If the request pertains to a public entity as defined in subdivision c of
23 subsection 12 of section 44-04-17.1, the opinion must be issued to the public entity
24 providing the public funds. In any opinion issued under this section, the attorney
25 general shall base the opinion on the facts given by the public entity.
- 26 2. If the attorney general issues a written opinion concluding that a violation has
27 occurred, the public entity has seven days after the opinion is issued, regardless of
28 whether a civil action is filed under section 44-04-21.2, to disclose the record, to
29 issue a notice of a meeting that will be held within a reasonable time to correct the
30 violation, or to take steps to correct any other violation. If the public entity fails to
31 take the required action within the seven-day period and the person requesting the

1 opinion prevails in a civil action brought under section 44-04-21.2, the person must
2 be awarded costs, disbursements, and reasonable attorney's fees in the action and
3 on appeal. The consequences for failing to comply with an attorney general's
4 opinion issued under this section will be the same as for other attorney general's
5 opinions, including potential personal liability for the person or persons responsible
6 for the noncompliance.

7 3. If a state-level public entity as defined in subdivision a of subsection 12 of section
8 44-04-17.1 does not comply in full with the attorney general's opinion, and a civil
9 action is brought under section 44-04-21.2 or is reasonably predictable, the entity,
10 at its sole cost and expense, shall retain separate counsel who has been approved
11 and appointed by the attorney general as a special assistant attorney general to
12 represent the entity in that action.