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SB-1244 Public records: disclosure. (2017-2018)

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Senate Bill No. 1244

CHAPTER 463

An act to amend Section 6259 of the Government Code, relating to public records.

[Approved by Governor September 17, 2018. Filed with Secretary of State September 17, 2018.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 1244, Wieckowski. Public records: disclosure.

The California Public Records Act requires a public agency, defined to mean a state or local agency, to make its public records available for public inspection and to make copies available upon request and payment of a fee, unless the public records are exempt from disclosure. The act makes specified records exempt from disclosure and provides that disclosure by a state or local agency of a public record that is otherwise exempt constitutes a waiver of the exemptions.

The act, when it appears to a superior court that certain public records are being improperly withheld from a member of the public, requires the court to order the officer or person charged with withholding the records to disclose the public record or show cause why he or she should not do so. The act requires the court to award court costs and reasonable attorney's fees to the plaintiff if the plaintiff prevails in litigation filed pursuant to these provisions, and requires the court to award court costs and reasonable attorney's fees to the public agency if the court finds that the plaintiff's case is clearly frivolous.

This bill would replace "plaintiff" with "requester" in that provision, would make conforming changes, and would specify that these provisions do not preclude the award of fees and costs pursuant to other provisions of law.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: no Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Section 6259 of the Government Code is amended to read:

6259. (a) Whenever it is made to appear by verified petition to the superior court of the county where the records or some part thereof are situated that certain public records are being improperly withheld from a member of the public, the court shall order the officer or person charged with withholding the records to disclose the public record or show cause why he or she should not do so. The court shall decide the case after examining the record in camera, if permitted by subdivision (b) of Section 915 of the Evidence Code, papers filed by the parties and any oral argument and additional evidence as the court may allow.

(b) If the court finds that the public official's decision to refuse disclosure is not justified under Section 6254 or 6255, he or she shall order the public official to make the record public. If the judge determines that the public official was justified in refusing to make the record public, he or she shall return the item to the public official without disclosing its content with an order supporting the decision refusing disclosure.

(c) In an action filed on or after January 1, 1991, an order of the court, either directing disclosure by a public official or supporting the decision of the public official refusing disclosure, is not a final judgment or order within the meaning of Section 904.1 of the Code of Civil Procedure from which an appeal may be taken, but shall be immediately reviewable by petition to the appellate court for the issuance of an extraordinary writ. Upon entry of any order pursuant to this section, a party shall, in order to obtain review of the order, file a petition within 20 days after service upon him or her of a written notice of entry of the order, or within such further time not exceeding an additional 20 days as the trial court may for good cause allow. If the notice is served by mail, the period within which to file the petition shall be increased by five days. A stay of an order or judgment shall not be granted unless the petitioning party demonstrates it will otherwise sustain irreparable damage and probable success on the merits. Any person who fails to obey the order of the court shall be cited to show cause why he or she is not in contempt of court.

(d) The court shall award court costs and reasonable attorney's fees to the requester should the requester prevail in litigation filed pursuant to this section. The costs and fees shall be paid by the public agency of which the public official is a member or employee and shall not become a personal liability of the public official. If the court finds that the requester's case is clearly frivolous, it shall award court costs and reasonable attorney fees to the public agency.

(e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit a requestor's right to obtain fees and costs pursuant to subdivision (d) or pursuant to any other law.