

Tuscola Behavioral Health Systems (TBHS)

PUBLIC SUMMARY OF FOIA PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

IT IS THE PUBLIC POLICY OF THIS STATE THAT ALL PERSONS (EXCEPT THOSE PERSONS INCARCERATED IN STATE OR LOCAL CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES) ARE ENTITLED TO FULL AND COMPLETE INFORMATION REGARDING THE AFFAIRS OF GOVERNMENT AND THE OFFICIAL ACTS OF THOSE WHO REPRESENT THEM AS PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES.

THE PEOPLE SHALL BE INFORMED SO THAT THEY MAY FULLY PARTICIPATE IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.

Consistent with the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Public Act 442 of 1976, the following is the Written Public Summary of Tuscola Behavioral Health Systems' (TBHS') FOIA Procedures and Guidelines relevant to the general public.

This is only a summary of the FOIA Procedures and Guidelines of Tuscola Behavioral Health Systems (TBHS). For more details and information, copies of TBHS' FOIA Procedures and Guidelines are available at no charge at any TBHS office and on the TBHS' website: www.tbhsonline.com.

1. How do I submit a FOIA request to TBHS?

- A request must sufficiently describe a public record so as to enable TBHS to find it.
- Please include the words "FOIA" or "FOIA Request" in the request to assist TBHS in providing a prompt response.
- Requests to inspect or obtain copies of public records prepared, owned, used, possessed or retained by TBHS may be submitted on TBHS' FOIA Request Form, in any other form of writing (letter, fax, email, etc.), or by verbal request.
 - Any verbal request will be documented by TBHS' on TBHS' FOIA Request form.
 - No specific form to submit a written request is required. However, a FOIA Request Form and other FOIA-related forms are available for your use and convenience on TBHS' website at www.tbhsonline.com, and at the TBHS Office located at 323 North State Street, Caro, MI 48723.
- Written requests may be delivered to TBHS in person or by mail: Attn: FOIA Coordinator, 323 North State Street, Caro, MI 48723.
- Requests may be faxed to: (989) 672-3173. To ensure prompt response, faxed requests should contain the term "FOIA: or "FOIA Request" on the first/cover page.
- Requests may be emailed to dsmith@tbhs.net. To ensure prompt response email requests should contain the term "FOIA" or "FOIA Request" in the subject line.

2. What kind of response can I expect to my request?

- Within five (5) business days after receiving a FOIA request, TBHS will issue a response. If a request is received by fax or email, the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day. TBHS will respond to a request in one (1) of the following ways:
 - Grant the request, or
 - Issue a written notice denying the request, or
 - Grant the request in part and issue a written notice denying in part the request, or
 - Issue a notice indicating that due to the nature of the request TBHS needs an additional ten (10) business days to respond, or
 - Issue a written notice indicating that the public record requested is available at no charge on TBHS' website.
- If the request is granted, or granted in part, TBHS will ask that payment be made for the allowable fees associated with responding to the request before the public record is made available.
- If the cost of processing the request is expected to exceed \$50.00, or if the Requestor has not paid for a previously granted request, TBHS will require a deposit before processing the request.

3. What are TBHS' deposit requirements?

- If TBHS has made a good faith calculation that the total fee for processing the request will exceed \$50.00, TBHS will require the Requester to provide a deposit in the amount of 50% of the total estimated fee. When TBHS requests the deposit, it will provide the Requester a non-binding best efforts estimate of how long it will take to process the request after you have paid your deposit.
- If TBHS receives a request from a person who has not paid TBHS for copies of public records made in fulfillment of a previously granted written request, TBHS will require a deposit of 100% of the estimated processing fee before it begins to search for the public record for any subsequent written request when **all** of the following conditions exist:
 - The final fee for the prior written request is not more than 105% of the estimated fee;
 - The public records made available contained the information sought in the prior written request and remain in TBHS' possession;
 - The public records were made available to the individual, subject to payment, within the best effort time frame estimated by TBHS to provide the records;
 - Ninety (90) days have passed since TBHS notified the individual in writing that the public records were available for pickup or mailing;
 - The individual is unable to show proof of prior payment to TBHS; and
 - TBHS has calculated an estimated detailed itemization that is the basis for the current written request's increased fee deposit.
- TBHS will not require the 100% estimated fee deposit if any of the following apply:
 - The person making the request is able to show proof of prior payment in full to TBHS
 - TBHS is subsequently paid in full for all applicable prior written requests; or
 - Three hundred sixty-five (365) days have passed since the person made the request for which full payment was not remitted to TBHS.

4. How does TBHS calculate FOIA processing fees?

The Michigan FOIA statute permits TBHS to charge for the following costs associated with processing a request:

- Labor costs associated with copying or duplication, which includes making paper copies, making digital copies, or transferring digital public records to non-paper physical media or through the Internet.
- Labor costs associated with searching for, locating and examining a requested public record, when failure to charge a fee will result in unreasonably high costs to TBHS.
- Labor costs associated with a review of a record to separate and delete information exempt from disclosure, when failure to charge a fee will result in unreasonably high costs to TBHS.
- The cost of copying or duplication, not including labor, of paper copies of public records. This may include the cost for copies of records already on TBHS' website if the Requestor asks for TBHS to make copies.
- The cost of computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media when the Requestor asks for records in non-paper physical media. This may include the cost for copies of records already on TBHS' website if the Requestor asks for TBHS to make copies.
- The cost to mail or send a public record to a Requestor.

Labor Costs

- All labor costs will be estimated and charged in 15-minute increments, with all partial time increments rounded down. If the time involved is less than 15 minutes, there will be no charge.
- Labor costs will be charged at the hourly wage of the lowest-paid TBHS employee capable of doing the work in the specific fee category, regardless of who actually performs work.

- Labor costs will also include a charge to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits. TBHS may add up to 50% to the applicable labor charge amount to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits, but in no case may it exceed the actual cost of fringe benefits.
- Overtime wages will not be included in labor costs unless agreed to by the Requestor; overtime costs will not be used to calculate the fringe benefit cost.
- Contractor labor costs will be charged at the hourly rate of \$63.36 (six (6) times the current state minimum hourly wage).

A labor cost will not be charged for the search, examination, review and the deletion and separation of exempt from nonexempt information unless failure to charge a fee would result in unreasonably high costs to TBHS. Costs are unreasonably high when they are excessive and beyond the normal or usual amount for those services compared to TBHS' usual FOIA requests, because of the nature of the request in the particular instance. TBHS must specifically identify the nature of the unreasonably high costs in writing.

Copying and Duplication

TBHS must use the most economical method for making copies of public records, including using double-sided printing, if cost-saving and available.

Non-paper Copies on Physical Media

- The cost for records provided on non-paper physical media, such as computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media will be at the actual and most reasonably economical cost for the non-paper media.
- This cost will be charged only if TBHS has the technological capability necessary to provide the public record in the requested non-paper physical media format.

Paper Copies

- Paper copies of public records made on standard letter (8 ½ x 11) or legal (8 ½ x 14) sized paper will not exceed \$.10 per sheet of paper.
- Copies for non-standard sized sheets of paper will reflect the actual cost of reproduction.

Mailing Costs

- The cost to mail public records will use a reasonably economical and justified means.
- TBHS may charge for the least expensive form of postal delivery confirmation.
- No cost will be made for expedited shipping or insurance unless your request it.

Waiver of Fees

The cost of the search for and copying of a public record may be waived or reduced if in the sole judgment of the FOIA Coordinator a waiver or reduced fee is in the public interest because it can be considered as primarily benefitting the general public. TBHS may identify specific records or types of records it deems should be made available for no charge or at a reduced cost.

5. How do I qualify for an indigence discount on the fee?

TBHS will discount the first \$20.00 of fees for a request if the Requestor submits an affidavit stating that they are:

- Indigent and receiving specific public assistance; or
- If not receiving public assistance, stating facts demonstrating an inability to pay because of indigence.

The Requestor is **not** eligible to receive the \$20.00 discount if they:

- Have previously received discounted copies of public records from TBHS twice during the calendar year; or
- Are requesting information on behalf of other persons who are offering or providing payment to the Requestor to make the request.

An affidavit is a sworn statement. For convenience, TBHS has provided an Affidavit of Indigence for the waiver of FOIA fees on the back of TBHS' FOIA Request form, which is available on TBHS' website, www.tbhsonline.com.

6. May a nonprofit organization receive a discount on the fee?

A nonprofit organization advocating for developmentally disabled or mentally ill individuals that is formally designated by the state to carry out activities under subtitle C of the Federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, Public Law 106-402, and the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Act, Public Law 99-319, may receive a \$20.00 discount if the request meets ALL the following requirements in the Act:

- Is made directly on behalf of the organization or its clients.
- Is made for a reason wholly consistent with the mission and provisions of those laws under section 931 of the Mental Health Code, 1974 PA 258, MCL 330.1931.
- Is accompanied by documentation of its designation by the state, if requested by the public body.

7. How may I challenge the denial of a public record or an excessive fee?

Appeal of a Denial of a Public Record

If the Requestor believes that all or a portion of a public record has not been disclosed or has been improperly exempted from disclosure, the Requestor may appeal to TBHS' Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word "appeal", and identify the reason or reasons the Requestor is seeking a reversal of the denial. The Requestor must use the FOIA Appeal Form (To Appeal a Denial of Records), which is available on TBHS' website: www.tbhsonline.com.

Within ten (10) business days of receiving the appeal, TBHS' Chief Executive Officer will respond in writing by:

- Reversing the disclosure denial; or
- Upholding the disclosure denial; or
- Reverse the disclosure denial in part and uphold the disclosure denial in part.

Whether or not the Requestor submitted an appeal of a denial to the TBHS Chief Executive Officer, they may file a civil action in the County Circuit Court within 180 days after TBHS' final determination to deny their request. If the Requestor prevails in the civil action the Court will award the Requestor reasonable attorneys' fees, costs and disbursements. If the Court determines that TBHS acted arbitrarily and capriciously in refusing to disclose or provide a public record, the Court shall award the Requestor damages in the amount of \$1,000.

Appeal of an Excess FOIA Processing Fee

If the Requestor believes that the fee charged by TBHS to process their FOIA request exceeds the amount permitted by state law, they must first appeal to TBHS Chief Executive Officer by filing a written appeal for a fee reduction.

The appeal must specifically state the word "appeal" and identify how the required fee exceeds the amount permitted. The Requestor may use the FOIA Appeal Form (To Appeal an Excess Fee), which is available at TBHS Administration Building at 323 N. State Street, Caro, MI 48723 or on TBHS' website: www.tbhsonline.com.

Within ten (10) business days after receiving the appeal, TBHS Chief Executive Officer will respond in writing by:

- Waiving the fee; or
- Reducing the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the remaining fee; or
- Upholding the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the required fee; or
- Issuing a notice detailing the reason or reasons for extending for not more than ten (10) business days the period during which TBHS Chief Executive Officer will respond to the written appeal.

Within forty-five (45) days after receiving notice of TBHS' Chief Executive Officer's determination of the processing fee appeal, the Requestor may commence a civil action in the County Circuit Court for a fee reduction. If they prevail in the civil action by receiving a reduction of 50% or more of the total fee, the Court may award all or an appropriate amount of reasonable attorneys' fees, costs and disbursements. If the Court determines that TBHS acted arbitrarily and capriciously by charging an excessive fee, the Court may also award punitive damages in the amount of \$500.