[Cite as *Jones v. Bryan*, 2026-Ohio-4298.]

IN THE COURT OF CLAIMS OF OHIO

NICHOLAS DANIEL JONES Requester v. CITY OF BRYAN Respondent	Case No. 2026-00427PQ Special Master Sarah Pierce REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

{¶1} This matter is before me for a report and recommendation. R.C. 2743.75(F). I recommend that the court (1) deny respondent's motion to dismiss, (2) order respondent to reimburse requester's filing fee, and (3) order the parties to split equally the remaining costs of this case.

I. Background

A. The public-records request

{¶2} On April 9, 2026, Requester Nicholas Daniel Jones submitted his a public-records request to Respondent City of Bryan. *Complaint, filed Apr. 21, 2026*, p. 1, 4. Requester asked to inspect a variety of financial records dated from January 1, 2019, through December 31, 2023, to include:

> All [financial] transaction records . . . for any expenditures made with taxpayer funds[;]
>
> All monthly bank statements, account ledgers, transaction details, and related records for every City of Bryan . . . financial account[;]
>
> A complete list or summary of all . . . revenue sources received by the City of Bryan[; and]
>
> Payroll records showing all employee . . . compensation paid to City of Bryan employees and elected officials[.]

Compl., p. 4.

{¶3} On April 10, 2026, the City responded to the request, denying it as overbroad. *Compl.*, p. 4-5. On April 17, 2026, the City provided audit reports for the requested time period. *Resp. Evidence, filed Jul. 29, 2026*, p. 6-8.

B. Procedural history

{¶4} This matter was referred to mediation. Mediation did not resolve the case, and a schedule was set for both parties to file evidence and memoranda supporting their positions. That schedule has run its course, making this case ripe for decision. *Order Terminating Mediation, entered Jul. 15, 2026*.

II. Analysis

A. Operative public-records request

{¶5} The only public-records request identified in the Requester's complaint form is the April 9, 2026, request for financial records. *See Compl.*, p. 1-3. This is also the only public-records request addressed by the parties' evidence and briefing. This report and recommendation is therefore similarly limited to that public-records request. *Hastings v. Washington Court House Bldg./Zoning Dept.*, 2025-Ohio-1292, ¶ 7 (Ct. of Cl.) ("[T]he the only matters properly before the Court or Special Master are those identified in the body of the complaint.").

B. The public-records request is overbroad and unenforceable; the City did not comply with its R.C. 149.43(B)(2) duty.

{¶6} A person seeking to compel production of public records through Revised Code 2743.75 must "plead and prove facts showing that the requester sought an identifiable public record pursuant to R.C. 149.43(B)(1) and that the public office or records custodian did not make the record available." *Welsh-Huggins v. Jefferson Cty. Prosecutor's Office*, 2020-Ohio-5371, ¶ 26. Those facts must be proven by clear and convincing evidence. *State ex rel. McCaffrey v. Mahoning Cty. Prosecutor's Office*, 2012-Ohio-4246, ¶ 16; *Hicks v. Union Twp.*, 2023-Ohio-874, ¶ 20 (12th Dist.).

{¶7} A public-records request is unenforceable if it is too vague or indefinite to be properly acted on by the records holder. *State ex rel. Dehler v. Spatny*, 2010-Ohio-3052, ¶ 18 (11th Dist.). A requester is required to identify the records they seek with reasonable clarity. *State ex rel. Dillery v. Icsman*, 92 Ohio St.3d 312, 314 (2001); *State ex rel. Chasteen v. Ohio Dept. of Rehab. & Corr.*, 2014-Ohio-1848, ¶ 24 (10th Dist.). Without a

reasonably clear public-records request, a court cannot issue an order for production of specific responsive records. *Warchol v. Superintendent of Washington Local School Dist*., 2022-Ohio-3140, ¶ 20, adopted Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00698PQ (Oct. 4, 2022).

{¶8} For that reason, a public office does not violate the Public Records Act by refusing to produce records in response to an overly broad request. R.C. 149.43(B)(2); *Salemi v. Cleveland Metroparks*, 2014-Ohio-3914, ¶ 26 (8th Dist.). A request is overbroad if it seeks complete duplication of a whole category of records. *State ex rel. Zidonis v. Columbus State Community College*, 2012-Ohio-4228, ¶ 21; *State ex rel. Dehler v. Spatny*, 2010-Ohio-5711, ¶ 3. In contrast, a request is not overbroad if it is bounded by reasonable time limitations, identifies a subject matter, and identifies or is directed towards specific officials. *State ex rel. Kesterson v. Kent State Univ.*, 2018-Ohio-5110, ¶¶ 25, 26; *Rose v. Ohio DOC*, 2023-Ohio-1488, ¶ 25, adopted 2023-Ohio-1856 (Ct. of Cl.).

{¶9} While a public office may deny a request that is "overly broad," it must also allow revision of the request "by informing the requester of the manner in which records are maintained [and accessed] by the public office." R.C. 149.43(B)(2); *accord State ex rel. Mack v. Ohio State Hwy. Patrol Cent. Records*, 2025-Ohio-1332, ¶ 14.

{¶10} Requester's April 9, 2026, public-records request essentially asks for every financial document generated or received by the City during a five-year period. The City notes that this request encompasses anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 documents. *Resp. Evidence, filed Jul. 29, 2026*, p. 3 ¶ 8 (Aff. City Clerk-Treasurer). Before release of these documents, the City would need to review and redact sensitive financial information, including account numbers, Social Security Numbers, and employee information. *Id*., p. 3, ¶ 7. This request seeks reproduction of entire categories of records and is therefore unenforceable. *Zidonis*, 2012-Ohio-4228, ¶ 21-23.

{¶11} Requester primarily argues that the City violated its public-records duties by failing to "inform" him "of the manner in which records are maintained [and accessed] by the public office." R.C. 149.43(B)(2); *Req. Brief, filed Jul. 24, 2026*, p. 2. The City argues that, given "the incredibly broad nature of this request," there was no reasonable information that the City could offer to assist the revision of the request. *Resp. Motion to Dismiss, filed Aug. 13, 2026*, p. 3. Further, the City offered and provided City audits from

the requested time period, which "could provide [Requester] with information about expenditures and revenues." *Id*.; *see also Resp. Ev*., p. 3 ¶ 9.

{¶12} When denying a public-records request as overbroad, a public office is required to "explain how its records are organized, so as to help requesters formulate reasonable public-records requests." *State ex rel. Huth v. Animal Welfare League of Trumbull Cty., Inc.*, 2022-Ohio-3583, ¶ 12. In its initial response to the public-records request, the City provided no information on this point nor offered further assistance to the Requester. *See, e.g., Zidonis*, ¶ 40; *see also State ex rel. Bott Law Group, L.L.C. v. Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources*, 2013-Ohio-5219, ¶ 39 (10th Dist.). In later communication, I agree that the City made a reasonable attempt to offer assistance by providing the audit reports for the requested timeframe. *See State ex rel. DiFranco v. S. Euclid*, 2015-Ohio-491, ¶ 24 (noting Supreme Court of Ohio has "emphasized that R.C. 149.43 contemplates that a requester and a public office should cooperate when a public-records request is made"); *see also Welin v. Hamilton*, 2022-Ohio-2661, ¶ 17-18, adopted 2022-Ohio-2660 (Ct. of Cl.).

{¶13} I therefore recommend that the court find the City violated R.C. 149.43(B)(2) with its initial response to the April 9, 2026, public-records request.

C. Costs.

{¶14} Revised Code 2743.75(F)(3)(b) provides that the court shall award a requester their filing fee and "any other costs associated with the action" if it finds a violation of the Public Records Act. Because I find that the City violated R.C. 149.43(B)(2), I recommend that the court order the City to reimburse the requester's filing fee. In light of the City's subsequent attempts to assist Requester by providing audit reports, I recommend that the costs be assessed equally between the parties. *Welin v. Hamilton*, 2022-Ohio-2661, ¶ 19, adopted 2022-Ohio-2660 (Ct. of Cl.).

III. Conclusion

{¶15} Based on the above considerations, I recommend that the court:

1) Deny respondent's motion to dismiss;
2) Order respondent to reimburse requester's filing fee;
3) Order the parties to split equally the remaining costs of this case.

{¶16} *Pursuant to R.C. 2743.75(F)(2), either party may file a written objection with the clerk of the Court of Claims of Ohio within seven (7) business days after receiving this report and recommendation. Any objection shall be specific and state with particularity all grounds for the objection. A party shall not assign as error on appeal the court's adoption of any factual findings or legal conclusions in this report and recommendation unless a timely objection was filed thereto. R.C. 2743.75(G)(1).*

SARAH PIERCE
Special Master

Filed September 9, 2026
Sent to S.C. Reporter 10/30/26