

**Digging into DC**  
**Open Records Tips from the D.C. Open Government Coalition**  
Questions: [diggingintodc@gmail.com](mailto:diggingintodc@gmail.com)

How to write your request in D.C.

**Most agencies** ask that you submit your request electronically to [foia-dc.gov](https://foia-dc.gov)

**But!!!! For the D.C. Council** you must write a request and email it or snail mail it:

**COUNCIL FOIA OFFICERS**

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**How should I phrase my request for information?**

Here's what D.C. Open Government Coalition Board Member Sandra Moscoso filed with D.C. Public Schools via the online portal re Covid-19 spread.

**Sandra asked for**

“The number of cumulative (since March 16 or first instance) and current active Covid-19 cases in the past 7 days by setting, i.e., child care center or school, including traditional public, charter, and private.

The number of students and separately the number of staff currently in quarantine due to COVID-19 by in-person student support center, child care center or school, including traditional public, charter, and private.

The number of deaths due to COVID-19 of either staff or students who were in in-person student support center, childcare centers or schools, including traditional public, charter, and private (this doesn't mean they had to have contracted COVID-19 in this setting).

The cumulative number of outbreaks in in-person student support centers, childcare centers or schools, including traditional public, charter, and private and the definition being used to define an outbreak.

(Date Range for Record Search: From 03/16/2020 To 11/19/2020)”

## Open Records Tips-2

### Additional words that might help:

D.C. OGC board member Jim McLaughlin suggests including this phrasing to try to minimize the redactions (blacked out text) or refusals to supply information:

- To the extent [the agency] determines that any of the requested records are covered by non-mandatory exemptions (i.e., "may" but not "must" be withheld), I ask that you consider exercising your discretion to release the records, in accordance with the pro-disclosure purpose of the statute.
- To the extent any of the requested records contain both exempt and non-exempt information, I trust that any "reasonably segregable" portions will be provided, with the reasons for each deletion noted on the record, in accordance with D.C. Code § 2-534(b).

### Problem solving:

I waited 15 days as the law required, and then the agency turned me down or asked me for a hefty fee. What should I do next?

- Find out what the hangup is and if you can negotiate or narrow request
- Ask for everything electronically, and flash that flash drive
- Offer to sit down and review documents in their office
- Ask for itemized cost of fulfilling request and explanation of each item
- Contact D.C. Office of Open Government for help: Telephone: (202) 481-3411 Email: [opengovoffice@dc.gov](mailto:opengovoffice@dc.gov)

### In general, what information can I get from my local government?

- Enforcement records
- Use and occupancy licenses
- Health inspection reports
- Nursing home inspection reports
- Day care licensing and inspection reports
- Public/private deals and details
- Backup documents for state, county, municipal budgets
- Public contracts, and backup documents for public contracts
- Expense reports, and backup documents
- Lists of finalists for public appointments, such as school superintendents
- Itemized expense accounts for public officials
- Audits

