

WA Surveillance Watch Template

HOW TO FILE A SURVEILLANCE CAMERA PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST

A Step-by-Step Guide for Washington State Residents

Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater, and All WA Cities &
Counties

📖 TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. [Introduction - Why This Matters](#)
 2. [Before You Start - What You Need to Know](#)
 3. [Step 1: Identify Your Local Agency](#)
 4. [Step 2: Find Surveillance Cameras in Your Area](#)
 5. [Step 3: Choose Your Template](#)
 6. [Step 4: Customize Your Request](#)
 7. [Step 5: Submit Your Request](#)
 8. [Step 6: What to Expect](#)
 9. [Step 7: Follow Up](#)
 10. [Local Agency Contact Information](#)
 11. [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
 12. [Troubleshooting Common Issues](#)
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📌 INTRODUCTION - WHY THIS MATTERS

What's Happening in Washington State

Law enforcement agencies across Washington are deploying surveillance camera systems that: - Automatically photograph every vehicle that passes by - Capture images of drivers and passengers - Store this data for weeks or months - Share data with other agencies, including federal immigration enforcement

Recent developments: - A November 2024 court ruling confirmed this data is public record - A University of Washington report revealed federal agencies accessed local surveillance systems without agencies' knowledge - Several cities have paused or shut down camera programs due to transparency concerns

Your Right to Know

Under Washington's Public Records Act (RCW 42.56), you have the **legal right** to request information about: - What surveillance systems your city or county uses - Where cameras are located - Who has access to the data - How the data is being used

This guide will walk you through the entire process, step by step, so you can exercise your rights and bring transparency to surveillance in your community.

✓ **BEFORE YOU START - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

What You'll Need

- ✓ Email address (preferred) or mailing address
- ✓ Phone number (optional but helpful)
- ✓ 15-30 minutes to prepare your request
- ✓ The templates provided (downloaded or copied)
- ✓ Basic information about your local police department

What You DON'T Need

- ✗ A lawyer
- ✗ A special reason or justification
- ✗ To be a journalist or researcher
- ✗ To explain why you want the information
- ✗ To pay upfront (most electronic records are free or low-cost)

Important Reassurances

"Will I get in trouble?" No. Filing public records requests is a constitutional right protected by Washington law.

"Will they know I'm investigating them?" Your request will be public record itself, but requesting information is completely legal and appropriate.

"What if I don't know exactly what to ask for?" That's okay! The templates are designed to be comprehensive. You can also offer to clarify your request if the agency needs help understanding what you want.

"I'm not good with legal stuff..." Don't worry! This guide uses plain language and walks you through everything step by step.

🔍 **STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR LOCAL AGENCY**

Who to Contact

Surveillance cameras are typically operated by: - **City Police Departments** (for cities like Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater) - **County Sheriff's Offices** (for unincorporated areas) - **Washington State Patrol** (for state highways) - **Transit Agencies** (for buses and transit centers) - **Housing Authorities** (for public housing)

How to Find Your Agency

If you live in a city: - Contact your city police department - Example: "Olympia Police Department" or "Lacey Police Department"

If you live in unincorporated county area: - Contact your county sheriff's office - Example: "Thurston County Sheriff's Office"

If you're concerned about multiple areas: - You can file separate requests with each agency - Or start with one and expand based on what you learn

Quick Lookup

For Thurston County Residents: - **Olympia:** Olympia Police Department - **Lacey:** Lacey Police Department - **Tumwater:** Tumwater Police Department - **Unincorporated areas:** Thurston County Sheriff's Office - **Yelm:** Yelm Police Department - **Rainier:** Thurston County Sheriff (contract services)

Not sure who covers your area? - Call your city hall and ask: "Who provides police services in my area?" - Or search online: "[Your City] police department"

STEP 2: FIND SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS IN YOUR AREA

Why This Matters

You'll get better results if you can identify specific camera locations, but it's not required. You can also request "all surveillance camera locations operated by [Department Name]."

How to Spot Surveillance Cameras

What to look for:

Flock Safety ALPR Cameras: - Small, square-ish boxes on poles - Often at intersections or neighborhood entrances - Usually have a small solar panel on top - May have "Flock Safety" branding - Common in residential neighborhoods

Traditional ALPR (License Plate Readers): - Mounted on police patrol cars (mobile units) - Fixed cameras on highway overpasses - May be larger with multiple camera lenses

Video Surveillance: - Traditional security-style cameras - May be mounted on buildings or poles - Could be part of city camera networks

Document What You Find

Make notes including: - Specific location (address or intersection) - What type of camera you think it is - Date you observed it - Take a photo if safe to do so (from public property)

Example notes:

- Intersection of 4th Ave and Capitol Way, Olympia
- Small square camera on pole, appears to be Flock ALPR
- Observed on November 10, 2024
- Photo saved to phone

Online Research

Check local news: - Search: "[Your City] Flock cameras" or "[Your City] license plate readers" - Local news often reports when cameras are installed

City council meetings: - Check your city's website for council meeting agendas/minutes - Search for "surveillance" "cameras" "Flock" "ALPR"

Community social media: - Local Facebook groups or Nextdoor may have discussions - Residents often notice and discuss new cameras

If You Can't Find Specific Cameras

That's okay! You can still request: - "All surveillance camera locations operated by [Department]" - "Complete inventory of ALPR and video surveillance systems" - "Maps showing all camera deployments"

The agency is required to search for and provide this information.

STEP 3: CHOOSE YOUR TEMPLATE

You have two template options. Choose based on your needs:

Option A: Simplified Template (RECOMMENDED FOR BEGINNERS)

Best for: - Your first public records request - Quick, straightforward requests - When you want key information without overwhelming detail

What you'll get: - Camera locations and contracts - Basic policies and costs - Data sharing information - Federal access records

Length: 2 pages

Use this if: You're new to public records requests or want a simple, efficient approach.

Option B: Comprehensive Template (FOR DETAILED INVESTIGATION)

Best for: - Thorough investigations - Journalists or researchers - When you want maximum information - Follow-up after initial request

What you'll get: - Everything in the simplified version, plus: - Detailed technical specifications - Extensive correspondence records - Financial analyses - Training materials - Audit procedures

Length: 6 pages

Use this if: You want comprehensive information or are doing in-depth research.

Our Recommendation

Start with the Simplified Template. You can always file follow-up requests for additional details later. The simplified version will give you the key information you need without overwhelming the agency or yourself.

STEP 4: CUSTOMIZE YOUR REQUEST

Open the Template

1. Open the template file (Simplified or Comprehensive)
2. Use a word processor or text editor
3. Look for all text in [BRACKETS] - these are placeholders you need to fill in

Fill in the Blanks

Work through the template from top to bottom, replacing each [PLACEHOLDER] with your information:

Section 1: Date and Contact Information

Replace:

****Date:**** [INSERT DATE]

With:

****Date:**** November 15, 2024

Replace:

****To:**** [POLICE DEPARTMENT NAME] - Public Records Officer
****Email:**** [DEPARTMENT EMAIL]

****From:**** [YOUR NAME] | [YOUR EMAIL] | [YOUR PHONE]

With:

****To:**** Olympia Police Department - Public Records Officer
****Email:**** publicrecords@olympiawa.gov

****From:**** Jane Smith | jane.smith@email.com | (360) 555-1234

Section 2: Department Name in Request Body

Replace every instance of:

[DEPARTMENT NAME]

With your actual department:

Olympia Police Department

Tip: Use Find & Replace function to change all instances at once: - Press Ctrl+F (or Cmd+F on Mac) - Type "[DEPARTMENT NAME]" - Replace all with "Olympia Police Department"

Section 3: Camera Locations

Replace:

****Specific Camera Locations:****
- [INSERT LOCATION 1]
- [INSERT LOCATION 2]
- [INSERT LOCATION 3]

With your specific locations or general request:

Option 1 - Specific Cameras:

****Specific Camera Locations:****
- Intersection of 4th Ave and Capitol Way, Olympia
- Martin Way near Sleater-Kinney Road, Lacey
- Capitol Blvd and Deschutes Parkway, Tumwater
- All other surveillance camera locations operated by your

department

Option 2 - General Request (if you don't have specific locations):

****Specific Camera Locations:****

- All surveillance camera locations operated by Olympia Police Department
- Request includes complete inventory of all camera systems by location

Section 4: Date Ranges

Replace:

For the period [START DATE] to [END DATE]:

With:

Option 1 - Recent period:

For the period January 1, 2024 to present:

Option 2 - Since program began:

For the period from program inception to present:

Option 3 - Specific period:

For the period June 1, 2024 to November 15, 2024:

Also replace:

****Time Period:**** [INSERT DATES or "All records since program inception"]

With:

****Time Period:**** All records from program inception to present

Section 5: Your Contact Information (Bottom)

Replace:

****Contact:**** [YOUR EMAIL] (preferred) | [YOUR PHONE]

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

[DATE]

With:

****Contact:**** jane.smith@email.com (preferred) | (360) 555-1234

Sincerely,

Jane Smith

November 15, 2024

Double-Check Your Work

Before submitting, verify: - ✓ No [BRACKETS] remain in the document - ✓ All dates are current - ✓ Email addresses are correct (yours and the agency's) - ✓ Department name is consistent throughout - ✓ Camera locations are accurate - ✓ Your contact information is complete

Save Your Customized Request

Save with a clear filename:

Public_Records_Request_Olympia_PD_2024-11-15.pdf

or

Surveillance_Camera_Request_Lacey_Police.docx

Save in multiple formats: - Original editable version (Word/Google Docs) - PDF for submission - Keep a copy for your records

STEP 5: SUBMIT YOUR REQUEST

Submission Methods (In Order of Preference)

Method 1: Email (RECOMMENDED)

Advantages: - Creates automatic paper trail - Provides proof of delivery - Fastest delivery - Usually gets quickest response - Easy to track

How to submit: 1. Address email to the agency's public records email 2. Subject line: "Public Records Request - Surveillance Cameras" 3. Attach your customized request as PDF 4. In the email body, write:

Dear Public Records Officer,

Attached please find my public records request regarding surveillance camera systems operated by [Department Name].

Please confirm receipt of this request within five business days as required by RCW 42.56.520.

I prefer to receive records electronically via email.

Thank you,
[Your Name]
[Your Email]
[Your Phone]

5. Send and save confirmation
6. Note the date and time sent

Method 2: Online Portal

Some agencies have online submission portals.

How to submit: 1. Visit the agency's website 2. Look for "Public Records Request" or "Submit Records Request" 3. Create an account if required 4. Upload or paste your request 5. Save confirmation number and receipt 6. Take screenshots of submission

Method 3: Mail (Not Recommended Unless Necessary)

How to submit: 1. Print your request 2. Sign at the bottom 3. Make a copy for your records 4. Mail via **Certified Mail with Return Receipt** 5. Keep the tracking number and receipt

Why certified mail? - Proves the agency received your request - Starts the 5-day clock officially - Protects your rights if they claim they never received it

Method 4: In-Person Delivery

How to submit: 1. Print two copies of your request 2. Visit the police department or city hall 3. Ask for the Public Records Officer 4. Hand deliver your request 5. Ask them to stamp both copies with the date 6. Keep one stamped copy for your records

After Submission

Immediately after sending:

1. **Save confirmation**
 - Email delivery receipt
 - Portal confirmation number
 - Certified mail tracking
 - Date-stamped copy
 2. **Create a tracking file**
 - Folder on your computer
 - Include: original request, confirmation, all correspondence
 - Note submission date in calendar
 3. **Set reminders**
 - Day 5: Check if agency responded
 - Day 6: Send follow-up if no response
 - Day 10: Escalate if still no response
 4. **Document everything**
 - Keep copies of all emails
 - Screenshot any online portal updates
 - Note phone calls with dates and who you spoke with
-

🔍 STEP 6: WHAT TO EXPECT

The 5-Day Response Requirement

By law (RCW 42.56.520), the agency must respond within 5 business days.

Business days = Monday through Friday, excluding holidays

Example timeline: - Submit: Monday, November 11 - Day 1: Tuesday, November 12 - Day 2: Wednesday, November 13 - Day 3: Thursday, November 14 - Day 4: Friday, November 15 - Day 5: Monday, November 18 (deadline)

Three Possible Responses

The agency must do ONE of the following:

Response 1: Provide the Records

Best case scenario! - They send you the requested information - May be complete or partial - Usually via email with attachments

What to do: - Review what you received - Check if anything is missing - Send a thank you note - Determine if follow-up requests are needed

Response 2: Provide Time and Cost Estimate

Most common response: - They acknowledge your request - Estimate how long it will take (e.g., "30 days") - Provide cost estimate (e.g., "\$50 for copying") - May ask clarifying questions

What to do: - Respond to any clarifying questions promptly - Accept the timeline if reasonable - Request fee waiver if cost is high (see template) - Confirm your contact information - Ask for interim updates

Response 3: Deny the Request (Partially or Fully)

If they deny: - They MUST cite a specific RCW 42.56 exemption - They MUST explain how the exemption applies - They MUST provide any non-exempt portions

What to do: - Review the exemption they cited - Check if it's legitimate (see Troubleshooting section) - Reference the Skagit County court ruling if denied for "privacy" - Consider appealing or seeking help

No Response?

If you get no response within 5 business days:

1. Day 6 - Send polite follow-up email:

Subject: Follow-up - Public Records Request Submitted [Date]

Dear Public Records Officer,

I submitted a public records request on [Date] regarding surveillance camera systems. RCW 42.56.520 requires a response within five business days.

I have not yet received a response. Please confirm receipt of my request and provide the required response.

Original request attached for reference.

Thank you,
[Your Name]
[Email]
[Phone]

2. Day 10 - Escalate to department head

3. Day 15 - Consider formal complaint (see Troubleshooting section)

Understanding the Response

"We don't have that" - May be legitimate - Ask them to document their search - Consider whether they checked with vendors (like Flock)

"We need to redact some information" - This is normal and legal - They must explain what was redacted and why - You should still receive the non-exempt portions

"This will take several weeks" - May be reasonable for complex requests - Ask for interim updates - Confirm the estimated completion date

"There's a fee" - Most electronic records should be free or minimal cost - Can request fee waiver - Can ask for breakdown of costs

STEP 7: FOLLOW UP

If You Get the Records

Review what you received:

1. **Check completeness**
 - Did you get everything requested?
 - Are there obvious gaps?
 - Were some items marked as “not applicable”?
2. **Review for interesting findings**
 - How many cameras are there?
 - Where are they located?
 - Which federal agencies accessed the data?
 - What do the audit logs show?
3. **Follow up if needed**
 - File clarification requests
 - Request additional specific information
 - Ask about items that seem missing
4. **Share responsibly**
 - Consider sharing findings with local journalists
 - Contact advocacy groups (ACLU-WA, etc.)
 - Attend city council meetings to discuss
 - Be mindful not to expose sensitive personal information

If Records Are Incomplete

Send a follow-up request:

Subject: Follow-up Questions - Public Records Request [Original Date]

Dear Public Records Officer,

Thank you for providing records in response to my request dated [Date]. I have a few follow-up questions:

1. I requested network audit logs but did not receive them. Can you confirm whether [Department] has access to these logs through your surveillance vendor?
2. The camera location list shows 5 cameras, but the contract indicates 10 were purchased. Can you provide information about the additional 5 cameras?
3. Can you provide records showing which federal agencies have accessed your surveillance systems?

Please let me know if you need clarification.

Thank you,
[Your Name]

If You're Denied (Full or Partial)

See the Troubleshooting section below for detailed guidance on appeals and next steps.

Keeping Track

Maintain a simple spreadsheet:

Next Step

Date	Action	Response		Deadline
11/11/24	Submitted request	-	Wait for response	11/18/24
11/18/24	Agency response	Need 30 days	-	12/18/24
12/18/24	Records received	Partial	Follow-up needed	-

LOCAL AGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

Thurston County Area

City of Olympia

Police Department Public Records - Email:

publicrecords@olympiawa.gov - **Phone:** (360) 753-8300 - **Address:** Olympia Police Department, 900 Plum Street SE, Olympia, WA 98501 - **Website:** olympiawa.gov - **Notes:** Email preferred for public records requests

City of Lacey

Police Department Public Records - Email:

publicrecords@cityoflacey.org - **Phone:** (360) 459-4333 - **Address:** Lacey Police Department, 420 College Street SE, Lacey, WA 98503 - **Website:** cityoflacey.org - **Notes:** Has online portal available at city website

City of Tumwater

Police Department Public Records - Email:

publicrecords@ci.tumwater.wa.us - **Phone:** (360) 754-4200 - **Address:** Tumwater Police Department, 555 Israel Road SW, Tumwater, WA 98501 - **Website:** ci.tumwater.wa.us - **Notes:** Submit via email or in person

Thurston County Sheriff's Office

Public Records Division - Email: publicrecords@co.thurston.wa.us - **Phone:** (360) 786-5500 - **Address:** Thurston County Sheriff, 2000 Lakeridge Drive SW, Olympia, WA 98502 - **Website:** thurstoncountywa.gov/sheriff - **Notes:** Serves unincorporated areas and contract cities

How to Find Contact Info for Other Cities

Step 1: Find the agency website - Search: "[City Name] [Agency Name] Washington" - Example: "Spokane Police Department Washington"

Step 2: Look for public records information - Common page names: "Public Records," "Records Request," "Public Disclosure" - Often found under "Services" or "Departments"

Step 3: Identify the correct email or portal - Look for: publicrecords@[city].gov or similar - Some cities use online portals (NextRequest, GovQA, etc.)

Step 4: Verify contact information - Call the main number to confirm - Ask: "What's the best way to submit a public records request?"

Major Washington Cities - Quick Reference

Seattle Police Department - Email: SPD.PublicAffairs@seattle.gov - Portal: seattle-police.nextrequest.com

Spokane Police Department - Email: publicrecords@spokanepolice.org - Phone: (509) 835-4500

Tacoma Police Department - Email: publicrecords@cityoftacoma.org - Portal: Available on city website

Vancouver Police Department - Email: publicrecords@cityofvancouver.us - Phone: (360) 487-7400

Bellevue Police Department - Email: publicrecordrequest@bellevuewa.gov - Portal: bellevuewa.gov/recordsrequest

King County Sheriff's Office - Email: sheriff.public.records@kingcounty.gov - Portal: kingcounty.gov/depts/sheriff

Snohomish County Sheriff's Office - Email: PublicRecords@snoco.org - Phone: (425) 388-3395

Pierce County Sheriff's Office - Email: clerk@co.pierce.wa.us - Phone: (253) 798-7470

County Sheriff Offices by Region

Western Washington: - Whatcom County: wcsso@co.whatcom.wa.us - Skagit County: publicrecords@co.skagit.wa.us - Kitsap County: KCSOPublicRecords@kitsap.gov - Clark County: publicrecords@clark.wa.gov

Central Washington: - Yakima County: public.records@co.yakima.wa.us - Kittitas County: publicdisclosure@co.kittitas.wa.us - Grant County: publicrecords@grantcountywa.gov

Eastern Washington: - Spokane County: publicrecords@spokanecounty.org - Walla Walla County: publicrecords@co.walla-walla.wa.us - Benton County: publicrecords@co.benton.wa.us

Washington State Agencies

Washington State Patrol - Email: pra@wsp.wa.gov - Phone: (360) 596-4000 - Website: wsp.wa.gov

Department of Transportation (for highway cameras) - Email: publicrecordsrequest@wsdot.wa.gov - Phone: (360) 705-7070

? FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

General Questions

Q: Do I need to be a resident of the city to request records? A: No. Anyone can request public records from any Washington agency, regardless of where you live.

Q: Can I request records anonymously? A: No. You must provide contact information. However, your request itself becomes public, so others could see that you made it.

Q: How much will this cost? A: Many agencies provide electronic records for free or minimal cost (under \$10). Complex requests involving extensive copying or staff time may cost more. You can request a fee waiver.

Q: What if I can't afford the fees? A: Include a fee waiver request in your initial submission. Argue that disclosure is in the public interest. Agencies often waive or reduce fees.

Q: Can they refuse my request because I'm not a journalist? A: No. Any person has the right to request public records. You don't need to be a journalist, researcher, or have any special status.

Q: Will this affect my relationship with law enforcement? A: Public records requests are a legal right. Agencies should not retaliate. If you experience harassment or retaliation, contact the ACLU of Washington.

Technical Questions

Q: What if I don't know the exact camera locations? A: Request "all surveillance camera locations" and ask for a complete inventory. The agency must search for this information.

Q: What are "network audit logs"? A: These are records showing every search performed on the surveillance system - who searched, when, and why. They're crucial for accountability.

Q: What's the difference between ALPR and video surveillance? A: ALPR = Automatic License Plate Readers (photographs license plates). Video surveillance = traditional cameras recording video. Both are covered by the templates.

Q: Do I need to know what brand of cameras they use? A: No. The templates are broad enough to cover all brands. Just request "all surveillance camera systems" and list the common types.

Q: What if they have cameras but say they don't? A: Ask them to document their search. If you have evidence cameras exist (news articles, photos, city council minutes), provide this and request they search again.

Legal Questions

Q: What if they cite a privacy exemption? A: Reference the November 2024 Skagit County court ruling that rejected privacy exemptions for broad surveillance. See the Troubleshooting section.

Q: Can they charge me for their lawyer reviewing the records? A: No. RCW 42.56 specifically prohibits charging for legal review time.

Q: What's a "Glomar response"? A: When an agency refuses to confirm or deny records exist. This is rarely appropriate and can be challenged.

Q: How long do I have to appeal a denial? A: There's no specific deadline, but act promptly. Consider appeals within 30 days of denial.

Q: Can I sue if they don't comply? A: Yes. RCW 42.56 allows for penalties if agencies improperly withhold records. Consult with an attorney or the ACLU-WA.

Specific Concern Questions

Q: How do I find out if ICE has accessed my city's cameras? A: Request "network audit logs" and specifically ask for "records of federal agency access including ICE, CBP, Border Patrol, HSI, FBI, DEA, and any other federal agencies."

Q: What if my city doesn't have cameras yet but is considering them? A: Request: "All communications, proposals, contracts, and documents regarding consideration or evaluation of surveillance camera systems."

Q: Can I request video footage of myself? A: Yes. You may have enhanced rights to access records specifically about yourself. Mention in your request if seeking your own information.

Q: What about private cameras that police have access to (like Ring)? A: The templates cover this. Request "records of participation in Ring Neighbors Law Enforcement Portal or other private camera access programs."

Q: How often should I file requests? A: You can file as often as you like, but be reasonable. Consider quarterly or semi-annual follow-up requests to track changes.

Follow-Up Questions

Q: What should I do with the information I receive? A: Options include: - Share with local journalists - Present findings at city council meetings - Contact ACLU-WA or other advocacy groups - Publish findings on social media (be responsible) - File follow-up requests for more details

Q: Can I share the records publicly? A: Generally yes - public records are public. However, be thoughtful about not exposing sensitive personal information. Redact license plates, faces, etc. if sharing images.

Q: What if I find something concerning in the records? A: Contact: - ACLU of Washington: www.aclu-wa.org - Local journalists - Your city council representatives - Community advocacy groups

Q: How do I know if the response is complete? A: Look for: - Response to each item you requested - Explanation if something is missing - Reasonable completeness given your request - If in doubt, file a follow-up clarification request

🔧 TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON ISSUES

Issue 1: No Response After 5 Days

Problem: Agency hasn't responded within the required 5 business days.

Solution - Day 6:

Send this follow-up email:

Subject: FOLLOW-UP REQUIRED - Public Records Request [Date]

Dear Public Records Officer,

I submitted a public records request on [Date] regarding surveillance camera systems operated by [Department Name].

RCW 42.56.520 requires agencies to respond within five (5) business days. As of today, I have not received:

- Acknowledgment of my request
- Time estimate for response
- Cost estimate
- Provision of records
- Or denial with exemptions cited

Please respond immediately with one of the statutorily required responses.

If you did not receive my original request, it is attached.

I expect a response within 24 hours.

Thank you,
[Your Name]
[Email]
[Phone]

Solution - Day 10:

Escalate to department leadership:

Subject: Escalation - Unanswered Public Records Request

Dear [Police Chief/City Manager],

I am escalating an unanswered public records request to your attention.

On [Date], I submitted a public records request to [Department]. Despite the 5-day response requirement under RCW 42.56.520, I have received no response as of today (Day 10).

I have sent a follow-up email on Day 6 (attached), which also received no response.

Please ensure this request receives immediate attention and compliance with state law.

[Original request and follow-up attached]

Thank you,
[Your Name]

Solution - Day 15:

File a complaint:

- **Washington Attorney General's Office**
 - Online complaint: www.atg.wa.gov/ago-complaint-form
 - Email: opengov@atg.wa.gov
 - Phone: (360) 753-6200
- **Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC)**
 - Email: mrsc@mrsc.org
 - Can provide guidance on next steps

Issue 2: Denied for "Privacy Reasons"

Problem: Agency denies request claiming release would violate privacy.

Solution:

Respond with this appeal:

Subject: Appeal of Denial - Public Records Request [Date]

Dear [Department Head],

I am appealing the denial of my public records request dated [Date] regarding surveillance camera systems.

Your agency denied my request citing privacy concerns. However:

1. **LEGAL PRECEDENT:** In November 2024, Skagit County Superior Court Judge Elizabeth Yost Neidzowski ruled in Rodriguez v. City of Sedro Woolley that surveillance camera data qualifies as public records subject to RCW 42.56.
2. **COURT FINDING:** The judge specifically found that the scope of surveillance is "so broad and indiscriminate" – with most images capturing people not suspected of any crime – that the data **MUST** be released under public records law.
3. **REJECTED ARGUMENT:** The court explicitly rejected the same privacy arguments you are now asserting.

The law is clear: this data is public record. I request that you:

- Immediately reverse the denial
- Provide the requested records within 10 business days
- Or provide the specific RCW 42.56 exemption you believe applies (other than privacy)

Failure to comply may result in further action, including filing a complaint with the Attorney General's office or seeking judicial review.

[Original request attached]

Thank you,
[Your Name]

Issue 3: "We Don't Have Those Records"

Problem: Agency claims requested records don't exist, but you believe they do.

Solution:

Request documentation of their search:

Subject: Request for Adequate Search Documentation

Dear Public Records Officer,

Thank you for your response that certain requested records do not exist. To ensure an adequate search was conducted, please provide:

1. Documentation of the search performed (which systems/databases were searched, who performed the search, date of search)
2. Confirmation that you consulted with your surveillance system vendor (Flock Safety, etc.) regarding:
 - Network audit logs

- User access records
- System configuration settings

3. Explanation of why these records would not exist if you operate surveillance cameras

If the search was adequate and records truly don't exist, please provide this documentation so I can understand the scope of your search.

If the search was not adequate, please conduct a thorough search including consulting with vendors and IT staff.

Thank you,
[Your Name]

Issue 4: Excessive Fees

Problem: Agency quotes a fee that seems unreasonably high.

Solution:

Request fee waiver and cost breakdown:

Subject: Fee Waiver Request and Cost Breakdown

Dear Public Records Officer,

Thank you for your cost estimate of \$[Amount]. I am requesting:

1. FEE WAIVER pursuant to RCW 42.56.120:
 - This request is in the public interest
 - It is not for commercial purposes
 - Disclosure will contribute to public understanding of government surveillance operations
 - Given the recent court ruling and UW report on unauthorized federal access, transparency regarding surveillance systems is of significant public importance
2. DETAILED COST BREAKDOWN:
 - Breakdown by category (copying, scanning, staff time)
 - Number of pages/hours for each category
 - Rate charged per page/hour
 - Which specific records contribute to the cost

Note: RCW 42.56.120(3) prohibits charging for staff time to redact or conduct legal review.

If you need me to narrow my request to reduce costs, please suggest which portions could be eliminated.

I am happy to accept records in electronic format to minimize costs.

Thank you,
[Your Name]

Issue 5: Excessive Delay

Problem: Agency provides a time estimate that seems unreasonably long (e.g., 6+ months).

Solution:

Request interim responses and justification:

Subject: Request for Interim Records and Delay Justification

Dear Public Records Officer,

Thank you for your response estimating [X months] to fulfill my request. To ensure this estimate is reasonable:

1. Please provide detailed justification for the estimated time:
 - Approximate number of responsive records
 - Staff resources allocated
 - Workflow process
2. Please provide records on a rolling basis as they become available, rather than waiting until all records are compiled.
3. Please prioritize the following items for immediate response:
 - Complete list/map of camera locations
 - Contracts with surveillance vendors
 - Current policies on camera use and data sharing

These items should be readily available and can be provided within 10 business days.

I understand complex requests take time, but several months for records about a surveillance program seems excessive. Please work to reduce this timeline or provide interim deliveries.

Thank you,
[Your Name]

Issue 6: Heavily Redacted Records

Problem: You receive records but large portions are redacted (blacked out).

Solution:

Request explanation of redactions:

Subject: Request for Redaction Justification

Dear Public Records Officer,

Thank you for providing records in response to my request. However, I note substantial redactions throughout the documents.

RCW 42.56.210 requires that redactions be explained. For each redacted portion, please provide:

1. The specific RCW 42.56 exemption authorizing the redaction
2. A brief explanation of how that exemption applies to the specific redacted content
3. Confirmation that you have provided all non-exempt portions

Please provide an index or log identifying:

- Document title/description
- Page number(s)
- Exemption(s) cited for each redaction
- Brief explanation

If you believe entire documents are exempt, please provide a privilege log listing the withheld documents and the exemptions claimed.

I reserve the right to appeal specific redactions once I understand the basis for them.

Thank you,
[Your Name]

Issue 7: Agency Asks for Clarification

Problem: Agency asks you to clarify or narrow your request.

Solution:

This is normal! Respond promptly:

Subject: RE: Clarification of Public Records Request

Dear Public Records Officer,

Thank you for your questions about my request. To clarify:

[Answer their specific questions clearly and directly]

To ensure we're aligned, my primary interest is in:

1. [Your top priority item]
2. [Second priority]
3. [Third priority]

If providing all requested items would result in excessive delay or cost, please prioritize these items first and provide them on a rolling basis.

I remain willing to discuss the scope to ensure you understand what I'm seeking while preserving my rights under RCW 42.56.

Please let me know if you need any additional clarification.

Thank you,
[Your Name]

Issue 8: Agency Says “This is a Security Risk”

Problem: Agency claims releasing information would compromise security.

Solution:

Challenge this carefully:

Subject: Response to Security Concerns

Dear Public Records Officer,

I understand your security concerns. However:

1. The Skagit County court ruling addresses this exact argument and found it insufficient to withhold surveillance camera data.
2. If you believe specific information is exempt under RCW 42.56.240 (security records), you must:
 - Cite the specific subsection
 - Explain how disclosure would compromise security
 - Provide all non-exempt portions
3. General claims of "security risk" are insufficient. The exemption must apply to specific documents.

Please provide:

- All non-security-related records
- A privilege log for any records withheld

- Specific exemption citations

I am happy to discuss whether certain specific items (e.g., login credentials, encryption keys) might legitimately be withheld while still providing the bulk of requested information.

Thank you,
[Your Name]

When to Get Help

Contact these organizations if you encounter significant obstacles:

ACLU of Washington - Email: info@aclu-wa.org - Phone: (206) 624-2184 - Website: aclu-wa.org - They may provide legal assistance or guidance

Washington Coalition for Open Government - Email: info@washingtoncog.org - Website: washingtoncog.org - Advocacy and education on public records

Attorney General - Open Government Ombuds - Email: opengovernment@atg.wa.gov - Phone: (360) 753-6200 - Can help resolve disputes

Municipal Research and Services Center - Email: mrsc@mrsc.org - Phone: (206) 625-1300 - Provides guidance (primarily to agencies but also to public)

Last Resort: Legal Action

If all else fails, you may need to consider legal action. RCW 42.56.550 allows for: - Court orders compelling disclosure - Penalties against the agency (\$5-\$100 per day) - Recovery of attorney fees if you prevail

Before filing suit: - Document everything thoroughly - Exhaust administrative remedies (appeals to department head) - Consult with an attorney - Contact ACLU-WA to see if they'll take the case

✓ QUICK START CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to ensure you don't miss any steps:

Phase 1: Preparation

- ☐ Identify which agency to contact
- ☐ Research camera locations in your area (optional)
- ☐ Choose template (Simplified or Comprehensive)
- ☐ Download/save template

Phase 2: Customization

- ☐ Fill in current date
- ☐ Add agency name and contact info
- ☐ Replace [DEPARTMENT NAME] throughout
- ☐ Add camera locations or "all locations"
- ☐ Set date ranges for records
- ☐ Add your contact information
- ☐ Double-check: no [BRACKETS] remain
- ☐ Save customized version
- ☐ Create PDF for submission

Phase 3: Submission

- ☐ Find agency's public records email
- ☐ Draft submission email
- ☐ Attach PDF request
- ☐ Send and save confirmation
- ☐ Note submission date and time
- ☐ Set 5-day reminder

Phase 4: Follow-Up

- ☐ Day 5: Check for response
 - ☐ Day 6: Send follow-up if needed
 - ☐ Review records when received
 - ☐ Check completeness
 - ☐ File follow-up requests if needed
 - ☐ Consider sharing findings appropriately
-

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

You Can Do This!

Public records requests might seem intimidating, but thousands of ordinary citizens file them every year. You don't need special training or expertise - just curiosity and persistence.

Why Your Request Matters

- **Accountability:** Your request helps ensure surveillance systems are used lawfully
- **Transparency:** Brings hidden government activities into the light
- **Community Protection:** Helps protect vulnerable communities from unauthorized surveillance
- **Democratic Participation:** Exercises your fundamental right to know what your government is doing

Recent Victories

Remember: - Jose Rodriguez, a tattoo artist with no legal training, filed requests that led to a landmark court ruling - Several cities turned off their cameras when faced with transparency requirements - The UW report resulted from public records requests - Your request could reveal important information that serves the public interest

Common First-Timer Concerns

"What if I make a mistake?" - Agencies should work with you to clarify requests - You can always file follow-up requests - Mistakes are learning opportunities

"What if they get annoyed with me?" - Public records requests are your legal right - Professional agencies handle them routinely - Your rights don't depend on agency convenience

"What if I don't find anything interesting?" - Even "nothing to see here" is valuable information - Confirms systems are (or aren't) being used - Builds transparency regardless of findings

You're Not Alone

Thousands of Washington residents are concerned about surveillance technology. Your request is part of a broader movement for transparency and accountability.

Join the community: - Follow ACLU-WA on social media - Attend city council meetings - Connect with local advocacy groups - Share your experiences (thoughtfully)

Ready to Start?

1. Take a deep breath
2. Pick your template
3. Set aside 30 minutes
4. Follow this guide step by step
5. Hit send!

You've got this. Your community will benefit from your engagement.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Educational Resources

Washington Attorney General - Public Records Guide - Website: www.atg.wa.gov/public-records - Comprehensive guide to RCW 42.56 - Sample forms and letters

ACLU - Surveillance Technology Resources - Website: www.aclu-wa.org - Reports on surveillance technology - Know Your Rights materials

Electronic Frontier Foundation - Atlas of Surveillance - Website: www.eff.org/issues/surveillance - Searchable database of surveillance tech by location - Educational materials

Municipal Research and Services Center - Website: www.mrsc.org - Public records guidance - Local government resources

Legal Resources

RCW 42.56 - Public Records Act - Full text: apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=42.56 - Read to understand your rights

RCW 10.93.160 - Immigration Enforcement Prohibition - Washington's shield law - Limits on cooperation with federal immigration enforcement

Court Decisions - *Rodriguez v. City of Sedro Woolley* (Skagit County Superior Court, Nov. 2024) - Search news coverage for details

Reports and Studies

UW Center for Human Rights - "Leaving the Door Wide Open" Report (October 2024) - Website: jsis.washington.edu/humanrights

Institute for Justice - Plate Privacy Project - National ALPR litigation updates - Website: ij.org/plate-privacy

News Coverage

Local Investigative Journalism - KING 5 Investigators - Crosscut -
Seattle Times - Your local newspaper

Community Organizing

Washington Coalition for Open Government - Advocacy and
education - Website: washingtoncog.org

Local Civil Liberties Groups - Check for city-specific organizations -
University student groups - Community advocacy coalitions

🔗 QUICK REFERENCE CONTACT CARD

Print or Save This Card

MY PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST

Request Date: _____

Agency: _____

Contact Email: _____

Confirmation #: _____

5-Day Deadline: _____

IF ISSUES ARISE:

ACLU-WA: (206) 624-2184 | info@aclu-wa.org

AG Open Gov: (360) 753-6200 | opengovernment@atg.wa.gov

WA Coalition Open Gov: info@washingtoncog.org

IMPORTANT DATES:

Date	Action
	Submitted request
	5-day deadline
	Follow-up sent
	Records received

🎉 YOU'RE READY!

You now have everything you need to file your first (or next)
surveillance camera public records request.

Remember: - ✔ This is your legal right - ✔ Agencies must respond - ✔
You're helping your community - ✔ Resources are available if you
need help - ✔ Every request matters

Now go exercise your rights and demand transparency!

*This guide was created November 2024 based on Washington State
law and recent court precedent. While comprehensive, it does not
constitute legal advice. For specific legal guidance, consult an
attorney.*

Version 1.0 | Last Updated: November 2024

Questions about this guide? Contact advocacy organizations listed in the resources section.

Found this helpful? Share it with others concerned about surveillance in Washington State!