

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
OFFICE OF THE GENERAL COUNSEL TO THE MAYOR**

Freedom of Information Act Appeal: 2011-21

April 28, 2011

Mr. Ryan Coleman

Dear Mr. Coleman:

This letter responds to your administrative appeal to the Mayor under the District of Columbia Freedom of Information Act, D.C. Official Code § 2-531(a)(2001) (the “DC FOIA”), dated April 11, 2011 (the “Appeal”). You (“Appellant”) assert that the Department of Corrections (“DOC”) improperly withheld records in response to your request for information under DC FOIA dated March 11, 2011 (the “FOIA Request”).

Background

Appellant’s FOIA Request sought answers to two questions:

1. “Does the records office stay open 24 hours a day thus allowing inmates to be bailed out at any time?”
2. “On average after a bail is paid, how long does it take to release a person from DC Jail?”

In response, by letter dated April 11, 2011, DOC denied the request because agencies are not required by DC FOIA to create records that do not exist or to answer questions stated as a FOIA request.

On Appeal, Appellant challenges the denial of the FOIA Request on the ground that the questions can be answered easily.

In its response, dated April 26, 2011, DOC reaffirmed its prior position.

Discussion

It is the public policy of the District of Columbia (the “District”) government that “all persons 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 employees.” D.C. Official Code § 2-537(a). In aid of that policy, the DC FOIA creates the right “to inspect ... and ... copy any public record of a public body . . .” *Id.* at § 2-532(a). Moreover, in his first full day in office, the District’s Mayor Vincent Gray announced his Administration’s intent to ensure that the DC FOIA be “construed with the view toward ‘expansion of public access and the minimization of costs and time delays to persons requesting information.’” Mayor’s Memorandum 2011-01, Transparency and Open Government Policy. Yet that right is subject to various exemptions, which may form the basis for a denial of a request. *Id.* at § 2-534.

The DC FOIA was modeled on the corresponding federal Freedom of Information Act, *Barry v. Washington Post Co.*, 529 A.2d 319, 321 (D.C. 1987), and decisions construing the federal statute are instructive and may be examined to construe the local law. *Washington Post Co. v. Minority Bus. Opportunity Comm'n*, 560 A.2d 517, 521, n.5 (D.C. 1989).

While the contention of Appellant that the question can be answered easily may be correct factually, that is not relevant for purposes of DC FOIA. Under the law, an agency “has no duty either to answer questions unrelated to document requests or to create documents.” *Zemansky v. United States Environmental Protection Agency*, 767 F.2d 569, 574 (9th Cir. 1985). The law only requires the disclosure of nonexempt documents, not answers to interrogatories. *Di Viaio v. Kelley*, 571 F.2d 538, 542-543 (10th Cir. 1978). “FOIA creates only a right of access to records, not a right to personal services.” *Hudgins v. IRS*, 620 F. Supp. 19, 21 (D.D.C. 1985). *See also Brown v. F.B.I.*, 675 F. Supp. 2d 122, 129-130 (D.D.C. 2009). Subsection 1-402.4 of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations provides: “A request shall reasonably describe the desired record(s).” Appellant has not made a proper request under DC FOIA.

Conclusion

Therefore, we UPHOLD the decision of DOC. The Appeal is hereby DISMISSED.

If you are dissatisfied with this decision, you are free under the DC FOIA to commence a civil action against the District of Columbia government in the District of Columbia Superior Court.

Sincerely,

Donald S. Kaufman
Deputy General Counsel

cc: Karen Devalera