

**THE SINDH TRANSPARENCY AND RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT,
2016**

SINDH ACT NO. XV OF 2017

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[12th April, 2017]

AN ACT to provide for promoting transparency in the working of every public authority by setting out a practical regime for every citizen to secure access to information in a rapid and low cost manner under the control of public authorities, the constitution of a Sindh Information Commission and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

WHEREAS Article 19A of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan provides that every citizen shall have the right to access information in all matters of public importance, subject to regulations and reasonable restrictions imposed by law; **Preamble.**

AND WHEREAS transparency and access to information are essential principles of democracy which not only enable the populace to hold the Governments and their institutions accountable but also help in improving the system of governance;

AND WHEREAS it is essential that all citizens shall have right to information to participate meaningfully in the democratic process and further to improve their involvement and contribution in public affairs;

NOW, THEREFORE, it is expedient to provide for transparency and freedom of information to ensure that all citizens have better access to public information, to make the Government more accountable to citizens, to enforce the fundamental right to information in all matters of public importance, to ensure transparency in all Government matters and to provide for ancillary matters;

It is hereby enacted as follows:-

1. (1) This Act may be called the Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act, 2016. **Short title, extent and commencement.**
 (2) It shall extend to the whole of the Province of Sindh.
 (3) It shall come into force at once.
2. In this Act, unless there is anything repugnant in the subject or context – **Definitions.**
 - (a) “Applicant” means a citizen of Pakistan or a legal person registered or incorporated in Pakistan, seeking information under this Act;

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- (b) “Commission” means the Sindh Information Commission established under this Act;
- (c) “Commissioner” means an Information Commissioner and includes the Chief Information Commissioner;
- (d) “Document” means any order or decision made and duly notified;
- (e) “complainant” means a complaint made, in writing, to the Commission by an applicant on one or more of the following grounds;
 - (i) wrongful denial of access to information;
 - (ii) non provision of information within the stipulated time;
 - (iii) refusal to receive and process the request from an applicant;
 - (iv) furnishing false, misleading or incomplete information;
 - (v) charging fee or cost for provision of information in excess of the requisite fee;
 - (vi) deliberate destruction of information to avoid its disclosure;
 - (vii) failure of a public body to implement the provisions regarding proactive disclosure;
or
 - (viii) violation of any other provisions of the Act by a public body;
- (f) “Government” means the Government of Sindh;
- (g) “Information” means any information held by a public body and includes any memo, book, design, map, contract, representation, pamphlet, brochure, order, notification, document, plans, letter, report,

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accounts, statements, project proposal, photograph, audio, video, drawing, film, any instrument prepared through electronic process, machine-readable documents and any other documentary material regardless of its physical form or characteristics;

- (h) “Prescribed” means prescribed by the rules or regulations made under the Act;
- (i) “Public Body” means;
 - (i) a department, attached department, autonomous or semiautonomous body of the Government, a company of the Government or a special institution created by the Government;
 - (ii) a local government constituted under the Sindh Local Government Act, 2013 or any other law for the time being in force;
 - (iii) Secretariat of Governor of Sindh;
 - (iv) any Court, Tribunal, Office, Board, Commission, Council, or other body functioning in the province of Sindh;
 - (v) Provincial Assembly of Sindh;
 - (vi) statutory body established under a provincial law; and
 - (vii) a non-government organization substantially financed by the Government or a local government;
 - (viii) Secretariat of Chief Minister, Sindh;
- (j) “designated official” means a public information officer designated under section 7 of the Act, and

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- (k) “right to information” means the right to obtain information accessible under the Act and includes the right to:
- (i) Inspect any work or document;
 - (ii) take certified copy of a document; and
 - (iii) obtain copy of information in electronic form.
3. Every public Body shall at all times endeavor to maintain transparency in discharge of its functions. **Transparency of Actions.**
 4. Subject to provisions of this Act and any rules made therein, an Applicant may, in the prescribed manner, exercise the right to acquire information and/or record held by any Public Body. **Access to Information.**
 5. Subject to the provisions of this Act and any rules made herein, each Public Body shall ensure that all of the records which it holds are properly maintained so as to enable it to comply with its obligations this Act, and in accordance with any relevant rules or standards established by the Sindh Information Commission. **Proper Maintenance of Records.**
 6. (1) Subject to the provisions of this Act, a Public Body shall proactively disclose and publish: **Proactive Disclosure.**
 - (a) Particulars of its organization, functions and duties;
 - (b) Powers and functions of its officers and employees;
 - (c) Norms and criteria set by it for the discharge of its daily functions;
 - (d) Rules, regulations, notifications circulars, instructions and other legal instruments being enforced, issued or used by it or being used by its employees in the discharge of its functions;
 - (e) Statement of categories of information that are under its control;

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- (f) Description of its decision making processes;
- (g) Details of all its administrative and developmental decisions;
- (h) Directory of its officers and employees with their qualifications and respective remuneration, perks and privileges;
- (i) Budget including details of all proposed and actual expenditures;
- (j) Manner of execution of subsidy programs;
- (k) Full particulars of the recipients of concessions, permits or authorizations granted by it;
- (l) Facilities available with the public body for obtaining information held by it;
- (m) Complete particulars of its public information officer;
- (n) Any other information as may be prescribed;
- (o) Maintenance of record in respect of applications received and actions taken thereto;

(2) For the purpose of sub-section (1), every Public Body shall disseminate all information as widely as possible including the internet where possible so that all citizens have easy access to it.

(3) Every public body shall endeavour to ensure proactive disclosure of information as explained in sub-section (1) of section 6.

7. (1) Every public body, within a period of 45 days from the commencement of this Act, designate and notify an officer or any appropriate number of the officers to act and serve as a designated officer(s) not below the grade of BPS-16 with whom the request for information under this Act may be lodged. **Appointment of Designated Official.**

(2) In case, no such officer is appointed, the person in-charge of the public body shall be deemed as a Designated Official.

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(3) The Designated Official shall be responsible for ensuring full compliance of the provisions of this Act.

8. (1) Subject to the provisions of this Act, any applicant may make an application for obtaining information of the public body. The said application may be made in any form or manner to the Designated Official and duly acknowledged; **Application Procedure.**

(2) The Applicant shall be required to provide adequate description of the information and the details necessary to provide the requisite information.

(3) The Designated Official shall respond to the application as soon as possible and in any case within fifteen (15) working days. In case, the required information is not readily available, the Designated Official shall intimate the Applicant and take another ten (10) working days for responding to the application.

(4) Information needed to protect the life or liberty of any individual shall be provided within two working days;

(5) Where the Designated Official decides not to provide the information, he shall intimate the Applicant the reasons for such decision along with a statement that the Applicant may file an internal review;

(6) The information or the copy of any public record supplied to the Applicant shall contain a certificate at the foot thereof that the information is correct or the copy is a true copy of such public record, and such certificate shall be dated, signed and stamped by the Designated Official.

(7) The public body or the Designated Official shall not charge any fee for making a request other than cost of reproducing or sending the information in accordance with a centrally set schedule of costs stipulated by the Sindh Information Commission.

9. (1) Where the Designated Official decides not to provide the information, the Applicant shall request the head of the public body for internal review of the said decision, in relation to what the Applicant regards as involving. **Internal Review.**

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- (a) a failure by the Designated Official to comply with any provision of this Act including failure to communicate decision within the specified time; or
- (b) unreasonable behaviour by the Designated Official in the exercise of any direction under the Act; or
- (c) provision of incomplete, misleading or false information under the Act; and
- (d) any other matter relating to requesting or obtaining access to information.

(2) The Applicant shall, within sixty (60) days from the date of communication of the decision of the Designated Official or his failure to provide information within the stipulated time, submit a request, in writing, under sub-section (1) and specify remedy which the Applicant seeks against the of the Designated Official.

(3) The officer before whom an application for internal review is filed under this Section may exercise any of the powers of the Designated Official under this Act and shall, within thirty (30) days of the receipt of the application:

- (a) Confirm, modify or reverse the decision of the Designated Official;
- (b) Notify the decision of internal review to the Applicant including reasons for the decision; and
- (c) Order departmental action against the Designated Officials if found negligent in performance of duties under this Act.

10. (1) The Designation Official or the Public Body may refuse an application for access to information where disclosure of the information, in their opinion, shall or is likely to: **Exceptions.**

- (a) if it Causes harm to sovereignty and national integrity, that includes, national defence, security, public order and international relations of the country;

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- (b) Affect private sector interest, not related to public sector, unless the person connected has consented to disclosure of the information;
- (c) Affect protection of legally privileged information or of the rules relating to breach of confidence;
- (d) Affect legitimate intellectual property rights;
- (e) Cause harm to life, health or safety or property of any person;
- (f) Reveal the identity of a confidential source or hamper investigation of a case;
- (g) Affect prevention or detection of crime, the apprehension or prosecution of offenders, or the administration of justice;
- (h) Affect the fundamental rights of a citizen;
- (i) Cause damage to the economy as a result of premature disclosure of the proposed introduction, abolition or variation of any tax and affecting the economy of the country; or
- (j) Affect the formulation of or success of a policy either by its premature disclosure or by restraining the free and frank provision of advice within the Government.
- (k) Affect the fair evaluation of a candidate in a test, competition, examination, interview etc.

(2) Notwithstanding anything contained in sub section (1), if the Commission determines that the public in such disclosure outweighs the harm that shall or is likely to be caused by such disclosure, it may direct the Designated Official to provide the information.

(3) Where a part of a document is covered by an exception in sub section (1), any information in the document which is not covered by an exception shall be disclosed if it is reasonably severable from the rest of the document.

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(4) Provided, that the information withheld in accordance under this law shall be declassified after a period of ten years.

11. (1) Anyone who believes that this request has not been dealt in accordance with the provisions of this Act has the right to lodge a complaint with the Commission to this effect. **Complaints.**

(2) Complaint under sub-section (1) shall be free of charge.

(3) The Commission shall decide any complaint within a period of forty five (45) days.

(4) In an appeal, the Applicant shall bear the burden of proof of showing that the Designated Official or Public Body has acted in violation of this Act.

12. (1) The Government shall within a period of one hundred (100) days from the commencement of this Act, establish an Information Commission to be known as the Sindh Information Commission. **Sindh Information Commission.**

(2) The Information commission shall be an independent statutory body, which shall enjoy operational and administrative autonomy from any other person or entity, including government and any of its agencies, except as specifically provided for by law.

(3) The principal seat of the Information Commission shall be located at the provincial capital, and the Information Commission offices at each District Headquarters.

(4) The Information Commission shall comprise of three members appointed by the Government on such terms and conditions as may be prescribed and until so prescribed, as are determined by the Government.

(5) The Information Commission shall be headed by the Chief Information Commissioner, who shall be a retired Senior Government Servant not below the rank of BPS-20 and shall be appointed by the Government.

(6) The Information Commission, besides the chief Information Commissioner shall comprise of two other Members to be known

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as Commissioners, who shall be appointed in the following manner:

- (a) One Advocate of High Court of Supreme Court, who is qualified to be a Judge of High Court; and
- (b) A person from the civil society having experience of not less than fifteen (15) years in has profession.

(7) The Chief Information Commissioner and the Commissioners shall hold office for a term of three (03) years from the date on which they assume office and shall not be eligible for reappointment.

(8) Notwithstanding anything contained in sub-section (5), the Chief Information Commissioner and Commissioners shall not hold office after they have attained the age of sixty-five (65) years.

(9) A Commissioner may not hold any other public office, or be connected with any political party or be running any business or pursuing any profession at the time of or during their appointment to the Information Commission.

(10) A Commissioner may be removed by a positive vote of not less than two of the other Commissioners on grounds of failure to attend three consecutive meetings of the Information Commission without cause, inability to perform the duties of a Commissioner, failing to fulfil conditions for being a Commissioner or conduct which is materially inconsistent with the status of being a Commissioner.

(11) Notwithstanding any other Section, the Government may initiate the process of removing any Commissioner on the grounds of misconduct and physical or mental incapacity. Provided that before making any such decision, the government shall communicate the charges to the Commissioner and afford him reasonable opportunity to explain his position.

(12) If the Government is not satisfied with the defence offered by the Commissioner, it may refer the case to the Provincial Assembly for an enquiry by a Special Committee to be constituted by the Speaker of Provincial Assembly.

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(13) If the Committee finds the Commissioner guilty of any of the charges mentioned in sub-section (10), the Government shall remove the Commissioner.

13. (1) The Commission may:

**Functions of the
Commission.**

- (a) conduct an inquiry on a complaint and may direct a Public Body to disclose information to the Applicant;
- (b) determine the public interest in terms of Section 10 (2) of this Act;
- (c) resolve any inconsistencies in the application of the provisions of this Act or the rules or regulations;

(2) The Commission shall decide a complaint within forty five (45) days of its receipt and pass appropriate orders including recommending disciplinary proceedings against delinquent officials.

(3) The Commission may exercise the powers of a Civil court to:

- (a) summon and enforce attendance of persons, compel them to give oral or written evidence on oath and to produce documents or information;
- (b) examine and inspect information;
- (c) receive evidence on affidavits;
- (d) requisition relevant information from any office; and
- (e) issue summons for witnesses or documents.

(4) While inquiring into a complaint, the commission or any person authorized by the Commission, may examine any information on spot.

(5) The Commission shall facilitate the application of the provisions of this Act and may:

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- (a) issue directives to public bodies for preservation, management, publication, publicity and access to information;
- (b) prescribe the procedure for accessing information from a public body;
- (c) advise and provide support to the Government to make necessary laws and procedures for implementation of the right to information;
- (d) provide technical and other support to the public bodies for effective enforcement of right to information;
- (e) conduct training of the Designated Officials;
- (f) undertake mass awareness campaign to create awareness about the Act, rules and regulations;
- (g) establish an information web-portal;
- (h) compile a user handbook in Urdu, Sindhi and English, containing such information in easily comprehensible form and manner, as may reasonably be required by an applicant; and
- (i) compile guidelines for use by Designated Officials.

(6) The Commission shall prepare an annual report on the implementation of the provisions of this Act during a financial year and submit it to the Government.

(7) The annual report of the Commission shall, in particular, contain the following information:

- (a) status of right to information law, rules, regulations and procedures;
- (b) Progress on implementation of the freedom of information law, including district and department-wise summaries of information requests showing current status of each information request;

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- (c) Hurdles being faced in the implementation of freedom of information law; and
- (d) Budge, expenses and other organizational matters.
14. Government shall allocate adequate funds to the commission to enable it to establish a secretariat, hire the requisite staff to conduct its business properly, and promote access to information amongst the public, public servants and civil society. **Allocation of Funds.**
15. Where a Designated Official has, without any reasonable cause, refused to receive an application, has not furnished information within time limits, or with malafide intent denied the request or knowingly gave incorrect, incomplete or misleading information, the commission may, after providing sufficient opportunity of defence to the Designated Official, direct the said officer to pay fine which may extend to ten percent (10%) of his basic pay. **Penalty on Designated Official.**
- (1) Whosoever misuses the information obtained under this law with malafide intentions to exploit, the Information Commission may punish with a fine of Rs.1,00,000/- or an imprisonment of three months, or with both;
- (2) Whosoever misuses the information obtained under this law with malafied intentions to exploit, the Information Commission may, after providing sufficient opportunity of defense to that person, impose a penalty on that person, which may extend to Rs.1,00,000/-
16. In addition to any other action under any other law, any person who destroys a record which at the time it was destroyed was the subject of an application for access to information, internal review or complaint, or otherwise obstructs access to information which is the subject of an application; internal review or complaint, with the intention of preventing its disclosure under this Act, or violates any provision of this Act, shall commit an offence punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years six months or with fine which shall not be less than ten thousand rupees or (10%) percent of his basic pay or with both. **Offence.**
17. No Court shall entertain a suit, application or other proceeding in respect of any decision made under this Act and the decision shall not be called in question otherwise than by way of an internal review or a complaint under the Act. **Bar of Suits, etc.**

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| 18. | The Government in consultation with the commission may by notification in the official Gazette, make rules for carrying the purposes of this Act within sixty (60) days after establishment of the Commission. | Power to Make Rules. |
| 19. | If any difficulty arises in giving effect to the provisions of this Act, the Government may, by order in the official Gazette, make such provisions not inconsistent with the provisions of this Act as appear to it to be necessary or expedient for removing the difficulty. | Power to Remove Difficulties. |
| 20. | This Act and the rules shall be interpreted so as to advance the purposes of this Act and to facilitate and encourage, promptly and at the lowest reasonable cost, the disclosure of information and effective implementation of right to information. | Interpretation. |
| 21. | No suit, prosecution or other legal proceedings shall lie against any person for anything which is done in good faith or intended to be done in pursuance of this Act or any rules made under this Act. | Indemnity. |
| 22. | The provisions of Act shall take precedence over the provisions of any other law. | Act to take precedence over other laws. |
| 23. | The Sindh Freedom of Information Act, 2006 is hereby repealed. | Repeal. |