

TOWNSHIP OF WASHINGTON
BERGEN COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

RESOLUTION No. 19-320

**RESOLUTION CALLING FOR STUDY COMMISSION TO
REVIEW THE OPEN PUBLIC RECORDS ACT**

WHEREAS, the Township of Washington strongly believes in and supports open transparent government, and that citizens and residents have the right to be informed about the workings of government in order to best participate in a democracy; and

WHEREAS, on January 8, 2002 then Acting Governor DiFrancesco signed into law the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) which mandates that government records shall be available, with limited exceptions, for public access and simplifying the procedures for requesting such specific records; and

WHEREAS, the intent of the law was to provide the public with easy access to government records with an uncomplicated process for obtaining the records and eliminating bureaucratic red tape; and

WHEREAS, over the course of 18 years OPRA has been a positive light, but it has also been fraught with abuse and misuse, and has become an unanticipated financial cost to the taxpayers of New Jersey; and

WHEREAS, the Township of Washington has labored under a well-intended law that has spiraled out of control, due to the volume and nature of requests, the cost to taxpayers in responding to the requests, and the potential liability in having to pay disproportionate prevailing party attorney's fees should the requests turn into litigated matters, as well as the liability in determining which documents shall be released, with or without redaction, while attempting to maintain individual privacy; and

WHEREAS, it is not only the volume of OPRA requests that challenge our resources, but it is also the cost associated with reviewing, retrieving, and processing the OPRA request(s) by public entity personnel and counsel and possibly defending our action(s) before the Government Records Council or in Superior Court; and

WHEREAS, Township of Washington received and responded to four-hundred-and-fifty-seven (457) OPRA requests in 2017, four-hundred-forty-one (441) OPRA requests in 2018, and to date has received and responded to three-hundred-and-thirty-nine (339) OPRA requests as of September 1, 2019; and

WHEREAS, Township of Washington municipal staff has spent approximately fifty-one-hours (51) responding to OPRA requests received in 2019 to date, and a yearly average of approximately seventy-hours (70) since 2017; and

WHEREAS, with limited exceptions OPRA has not been amended to address the clear and apparent advancement in technology that has changed the way government records are created, stored, and/or transmitted; the various interpretive decisions; privacy concerns; abuse for commercial gain; and/or the ever-increasing cost to taxpayers; and

WHEREAS, as the current law approaches its twentieth (20th) anniversary it has outgrown its original intended use and has become ripe for comprehensive review and reform;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the governing body of Township of Washington appeals to the legislature to form a Commission comprised of Mayors, Municipal Clerks, Municipal Managers, Attorneys, Police Chiefs, open government advocates, privacy experts, members of the media, citizens and other appropriate stakeholders, to review and examine the effects of OPRA on local government and the needs to be fulfilled by the law, and use the Commission's findings to perform a comprehensive reform of OPRA; and

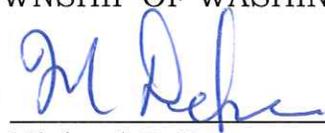
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that copies of this resolution be forwarded to Assembly Representatives Holly Schepisi and Robert Auth, Senator Gerald Cardinale, Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, Senate President Stephen Sweeney, Senator Weinberg, Executive Director of the Government Records Council, the Governor of the State of New Jersey, the Municipal Clerks Association of New Jersey and New Jersey State League of Municipalities.

ATTEST:

APPROVED:

TOWNSHIP COUNCIL OF THE
TOWNSHIP OF WASHINGTON


Susan Witkowski,
Township Clerk

BY 
Michael DeSena
Council President

DATED: December 9, 2019

MOTION	SECOND	COUNCIL	AYES	NAYES	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
Bruno	Bruno	Bruno	X			
Cascio	Cascio	Cascio	X			
Cumming	Cumming	X Cumming	X			
DeSena	DeSena	DeSena	X			
Ullman	X Ullman	Ullman	X			