

22.10 Civil enforcement.

1. The rights and remedies provided by this section are in addition to any rights and remedies provided by section 17A.19. Any aggrieved person, any taxpayer to or citizen of the state of Iowa, or the attorney general or any county attorney, may seek judicial enforcement of the requirements of this chapter in an action brought against the lawful custodian and any other persons who would be appropriate defendants under the circumstances. Suits to enforce this chapter shall be brought in the district court for the county in which the lawful custodian has its principal place of business.

2. Once a party seeking judicial enforcement of this chapter demonstrates to the court that the defendant is subject to the requirements of this chapter, that the records in question are government records, and that the defendant refused to make those government records available for examination and copying by the plaintiff, the burden of going forward shall be on the defendant to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of this chapter.

3. Upon a finding by a preponderance of the evidence that a lawful custodian has violated any provision of this chapter, a court:

a. Shall issue an injunction punishable by civil contempt ordering the offending lawful custodian and other appropriate persons to comply with the requirements of this chapter in the case before it and, if appropriate, may order the lawful custodian and other appropriate persons to refrain for one year from any future violations of this chapter.

b. Shall assess the persons who participated in its violation damages in the amount of not more than five hundred dollars and not less than one hundred dollars. However, if a person knowingly participated in such a violation, damages shall be in the amount of not more than two thousand five hundred dollars and not less than one thousand dollars. These damages shall be paid by the court imposing them to the state of Iowa if the body in question is a state government body, or to the local government involved if the body in question is a local government body. A person found to have violated this chapter shall not be assessed such damages if that person proves that the person did any of the following:

(1) Voted against the action violating this chapter, refused to participate in the action violating this chapter, or engaged in reasonable efforts under the circumstances to resist or prevent the action in violation of this chapter.

(2) Had good reason to believe and in good faith believed facts which, if true, would have indicated compliance with the requirements of this chapter.

(3) Reasonably relied upon a decision of a court, a formal opinion of the attorney general, or the attorney for the government body, given in writing, or as memorialized in the minutes of the meeting at which a formal oral opinion was given, or an advisory opinion of the attorney general or the attorney for the government body, given in writing.

c. Shall order the payment of all costs and reasonable attorney fees, including appellate attorney fees, to any plaintiff successfully establishing a violation of this chapter in the action brought under this section. The costs and fees shall be paid by the particular persons who were assessed damages under paragraph "b" of this subsection. If no such persons exist because they have a lawful defense under that paragraph to the imposition of such damages, the costs and fees shall be paid to the successful plaintiff from the budget of the offending government body or its parent.

d. Shall issue an order removing a person from office if that person has engaged in a prior violation of this chapter for which damages were assessed against the person during the person's term.

4. Ignorance of the legal requirements of this chapter is not a defense to an enforcement proceeding brought under this section. A lawful custodian or its designee in doubt about the legality of allowing the examination or copying or refusing to allow the examination or copying of a government record is authorized to bring suit at the expense of that government body in the district court of the county of the lawful custodian's principal place of business, or to seek an opinion of the attorney general or the attorney for the lawful custodian, to ascertain the legality of any such action.

84 Acts, ch 1185, §9; 2005 Acts, ch 99, §2; 2011 Acts, ch 106, §11, 12, 17

[T] Subsection 3, paragraph b amended

[T] Subsection 5 stricken