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STATE OF MARYLAND
PUBLIC INFORMATION ACT COMPLIANCE BOARD

PIACB 26-74

July 8, 2026

State Department of Assessments and Taxation, Custodian
Justin Holder, Complainant

Complainant Justin Holder alleges that the State Department of Assessments and Taxation (“SDAT”) has violated the Public Information Act (“PIA”) by failing to respond to a request for public records. After review of the submissions, we find no violation of the PIA.

Background

On January 26, 2026, the complainant sent the PIA request below to SDAT asking for:

[A]ny/all public records that inform me of a) each time SDAT has determined a deed to be one of those allegedly “Erroneous Deeds”, b) all correspondence between SDAT and the grantor and/or grantee of the deed that was determined by SDAT to be one of those allegedly “Erroneous Deeds”, c) the documents, research, (perhaps extensive and perhaps on title), or other deliberations that were SDAT relied to determine a deed to be one of those allegedly “Erroneous Deeds”, d) actions SDAT took after it determined a deed to be one of those allegedly “Erroneous Deeds”, and e) the Md authority, law, statute, COMAR or other regulation or legislation that would invest SDAT with the authority to make the determination a deed to be one of those allegedly “Erroneous Deeds”, rather than a circuit court that may have the original and/or exclusive jurisdiction to determine the title to real property in Maryland, (otherwise known as the “right grantor”, e. g. superior claim to title to real property).

The complainant referred to an SDAT policy that dealt with “erroneous deeds,” which the complainant stated “discusses cerertain actiuons [sic] that SDAT should or should not take in certain [sic] situations as outlined therein.”

On January 26, 2026, the complainant also contacted the Public Access Ombudsman¹ to request dispute resolution assistance with regard to several PIA requests to SDAT, including the one above. On February 26, 2026, the Ombudsman issued a final determination stating that the dispute was not resolved due to conflict.² The complainant then filed this complaint with our Board.

The complainant's complaint reads as follows:

On 01/26/2026 I made a request to inspect public records as outlined in the attached MPIA and final determination. See Ex. 1 - Gmail - MPIA - SDAT POLICY - Assessment Records Category No 045 Transfer Process Subject No 030 Alleged Erroneous Deeds No 33. On Feb. 11, 2026 I did receive an email from SDAT, that discussed a \$127.50 fee and "wrong grantor" deeds, and I followed up, seeking clarity, but never got any, other than "wrong grantor" records not existing. See Ex. 2 - Gmail - PIACB 26-34 and PIACB 25-76 Responses; see also Ex. 1 p. 3 (SDAT explaining that "in response to [my] request for documents related to instances where a deed has a 'wrong grantor,' SDAT does not maintain records of instances to which [I] refer. Therefore, [SDAT] cannot provide you with any documentation."

In response to the complaint, SDAT first explains that SDAT has recently experienced turnover in the Public Information Act Coordinator position, and that this turnover has "significantly impacted SDAT's response time to all PIA requests the agency has received, and required employees to cover this role's responsibilities to the best of their ability." SDAT denies that it has "intentionally prolonged the response" to the complainant's PIA requests and states that it has "made multiple attempts to address his inquiries."

SDAT states that the complainant's January 26, 2026, PIA request concerning "erroneous deeds" was an "immediate response" to an email he received from SDAT in response to a slightly different PIA request, *see* PIACB 26-60, at 2-3 (June 18, 2026), in which SDAT advised that it did not have responsive records. After the complainant expressed disbelief, SDAT states, it "initiated a second department-wide internal search

¹ The PIA directs the Public Access Ombudsman to "make reasonable attempts to resolve disputes between applicants and custodians relating to requests for public records." Md. Code Ann., Gen. Provisions § 4-1B-04(a). Before submitting a complaint to our Board, a complainant must attempt to resolve a dispute through the Ombudsman and receive a final determination stating that the dispute was not resolved. *Id.* § 4-1A-05(a).

² The final determination states that the Office of the Public Access Ombudsman is unable to mediate the matter "due to ongoing conflicts that prevent both the Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman from serving as third-party neutrals in disputes involving Mr. Holder." See COMAR 14.37.02.07C for regulations governing conflicts of interest in the Ombudsman's office.

that involved all 24 assessment county offices.” According to SDAT, that search “confirmed again that there were no additional records pertaining to ‘Erroneous Deeds.’” SDAT states further that, “[t]he only file located pertaining to this matter was the Maryland Assessment Procedure Manual on Erroneous Deeds,” which was previously produced to the complainant. SDAT advises that some of the county assessment offices “located email conversations that are related to this matter,” and that those “conversation threads were provided to [the complainant] for additional background.”

The complainant, in reply, states that his complaint “alleges a crystal clear MPIA violation.” He asks us to request that SDAT “specify which records are responsive to which requests.”³

Analysis

The PIA charges us with reviewing and resolving complaints alleging certain violations of its provisions. § 4-1A-04(a).⁴ Under § 4-1A-04(a)(iii), we must review and resolve complaints that allege that a custodian “failed to respond to a request for a public record within the time limits established under § 4-203(a) or (d) of [the PIA].” If we find that a custodian has failed to respond to a PIA request, we are to issue a written decision and “order the custodian to . . . promptly respond.” § 4-1A-04(a)(2) and (3)(iii).

Section § 4-201(a) requires that a custodian allow inspection of public records unless the records are exempt from disclosure by law. Generally, a person who wishes to inspect public records must submit a request to do so in writing. § 4-202(a). A custodian must “grant or deny” a PIA request “promptly, but not more than 30 days after receiving the [request].” § 4-203(a)(1). The time limitations for responding may be extended with the consent of the requester, § 4-203(d)(1), or when the requester or custodian seeks resolution of a dispute through the Ombudsman or our Board, § 4-203(d)(2).

The submissions do not demonstrate a violation of § 4-203(a). The complainant submitted his PIA request to SDAT and contacted the Ombudsman on the same day, January 26, 2026. Under § 4-203(d)(2), once the complainant contacted the Ombudsman, and then later filed this complaint, SDAT’s time for responding to the PIA request was extended. It appears that SDAT has responded to the PIA request, as it states that it has no responsive records beyond the Maryland Assessment Procedure Manual on Erroneous Deeds, which was provided to the complainant. In addition, SDAT has now produced certain email records that are arguably responsive to the PIA request. In the event that the

³ Most of the complainant’s reply is dedicated to advancing claims related to his land disputes with other agencies and individuals. Because those land disputes are not within our jurisdiction, we do not detail that aspect of the complainant’s reply.

⁴ Statutory citations are to the General Provisions Article of Maryland’s Annotated Code unless otherwise stated.

complainant disputes SDAT's response, he must first attempt to resolve that dispute through the Ombudsman before we may review it.⁵

Conclusion

For the reasons discussed above, we find no violation of the PIA.

Public Information Act Compliance Board*

Sareesh Rawat, Chair
Samuel G. Encarnacion
Debra Lynn Gardner
Nivek M. Johnson

* Board member Kimberly A. Moses did not participate in the deliberation, preparation, or issuing of this decision.

⁵ We recognize that, in other matters involving this complainant in the same conflict posture, we have reviewed the sufficiency of the custodian's search, even though that particular dispute was not first brought to the Ombudsman as required by § 4-1A-05(a). *See, e.g.*, PIACB 26-19, at 6 n.8 (Dec. 17, 2025). We would decline to do so here. In those other matters, the sufficiency of the search was raised clearly in the complaint and the custodian, rather than objecting to our consideration of the allegation, responded to it in detail. This complaint does not present in that same posture.