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Attorney General Martha Coakley



[Home](#) > [Government](#) > [The Open Meeting Law](#) >

Open Meeting Law Complaint Process

Step 1: Filing a Complaint with the Public Body

A complaint must be filed in writing with a public body within 30 days of the date the alleged violation, or if the alleged Open Meeting Law violation could not reasonably have been known at the time it occurred, then within 30 days of the date it should reasonably have been discovered. The complaint must be filed using the Open Meeting Law complaint form available on the Attorney General's website. Public bodies, or in the case of local public bodies the municipal clerk, should provide members of the public with a copy of the complaint form upon request.

Click to download a copy of the [Attorney General's Open Meeting Law complaint form \(PDF\)](#).

Step 2: Public Body's Response

Within 14 business days of the date on which the complaint was filed, the public body must review the complaint and send to the AGO a copy of the complaint along with a description of any action taken to resolve the issue that was raised by the complaint. Within seven business days of the date that the complaint was filed, the public body may request additional information from the person making the complaint if necessary to resolve the complaint. The person making the complaint shall provide the additional information to the public body within 10 business days, and the public body shall have 10 additional business days (total 24 business days from the date complaint was originally filed) to act on the complaint and notify the AGO. The public body may request additional time to consider taking remedial action and must make that request in writing to the AGO, to the Attention of the Director of the Division of Open Government. The AGO may, at its discretion, grant additional time to the public body if it determines there is a showing of good cause to grant the extension.

Step 3: Filing a Complaint with the Attorney General

If the person who brought the complaint is not satisfied with the action taken by the public body, that person may file a copy of the complaint, along with any other materials the person making the complaint believes are relevant, with the AGO. The AGO may decline to investigate complaints that are filed with the Attorney General more than 90 days after the alleged Open Meeting Law violation, unless an extension was granted to the public body or the person making the complaint demonstrates good cause for the delay.

Step 4: Attorney General's Investigation

After reviewing a complaint and supporting materials, the AGO will determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the Open Meeting Law has been violated, and if so, whether to conduct a formal investigation. The AGO may request additional information from the person making the complaint. In the event that the AGO opens a formal investigation, the public body shall provide the Attorney General with such information and documents as may be requested. The AGO has the authority compel the production of documents, take oral testimony, and convene a hearing as may be necessary. The AGO will resolve complaints within a reasonable period of time, generally 90 days.

Step 5: Attorney General's Findings

The AGO will make findings, and where a violation has occurred, may order remedial action. If the AGO determines, after investigation, that the Open Meeting Law has been violated unintentionally, then the AGO will resolve the investigation by informal action or by formal ruling for more significant violations. The AGO may order remedial action by the public body directing immediate and future compliance with the law, attendance at a training session, release of records, or other appropriate action.

Where the AGO seeks to reinstate an employee or nullify the action of a public body as a remedy for the violation, the AGO will ordinarily convene a hearing to take testimony from witnesses to determine the appropriate remedy. If the AGO has reasonable cause to believe that the Open Meeting Law has been violated intentionally, the AGO may convene a hearing to determine whether the violation was intentional, whether the public body, one or more of its members, or both, were responsible, and whether to impose on the public body a civil penalty of up to \$1,000 for each violation.

Public bodies and members of the public should consult the Attorney General's [Open Meeting Website](#) for the most up-to-date procedural regulations and other materials related to the law.

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