

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COMMISSION  
OF THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT

In the Matter of a Complaint by

FINAL DECISION UPON  
REMAND

Ira Alston,

Complainant

against

Docket #FIC 2015-882

Commissioner, State of Connecticut,  
Department of Correction; and State of  
Connecticut, Department of Correction,

Respondents

September 14, 2016

The above-captioned matter was scheduled to be heard as a contested case on March 10, 2016, at 9:30 a.m. The complainant, who is incarcerated, was notified and was scheduled to appear via teleconference, pursuant to the January 2004 memorandum of understanding between the Commission and the Department of Correction. See Docket No. CV 03-0826293, Anthony Sinchak v. FOIC et al, Superior Court, J.D. of Hartford at Hartford, Corrected Order dated January 27, 2004 (Sheldon, J.). This matter was consolidated for hearing with Docket #FIC2105-883, Ira Alston v. Commissioner, State of Connecticut, Department of Correction; and State of Connecticut, Department of Correction. The complainant failed to appear for the hearing.

A Report of Hearing Officer recommending dismissal of the complaint for failure to appear was issued on March 10, 2016. The Commission considered such report at its regular meeting of April 13, 2016. At such time, the Commission remanded the matter to the hearing officer to permit the complainant to appear and present evidence. A remanded hearing was conducted on May 24, 2016, at which time the complainant and the respondents appeared, stipulated to certain facts and presented testimony, an exhibit, and argument on the complaint.

After consideration of the entire record, the following facts are found and conclusions of law are reached:

1. The respondents are public agencies within the meaning of §1-200(1)(A), G.S.
2. It is found that on November 30, 2015, the complainant requested to view four recordings from a handheld video camera or a stationary "Nice Vision Security" camera.
3. It is found that the respondents received the complainant's request on December 2, 2015, and shortly thereafter denied the complainant's request, by informing him that he is "not allowed to view videos unless directed to [do so] by the [Attorney General]'s office."

4. By letter filed December 23, 2015, the complainant appealed to this Commission, alleging that the respondents violated the Freedom of Information (“FOI”) Act by failing to permit him to inspect records, described in paragraph 2, above.

5. Section 1-200(5), G.S., defines “public records” as follows:

Public records or files means any recorded data or information relating to the conduct of the public's business prepared, owned, used, received or retained by a public agency, ... whether such data or information be handwritten, typed, tape-recorded, printed, photostated, photographed or recorded by any other method.

6. Section 1-210(a), G.S., provides, in relevant part:

Except as otherwise provided by any federal law or state statute, all records maintained or kept on file by any public agency, whether or not such records are required by any law or by any rule or regulation, shall be public records and every person shall have the right to ... inspect such records promptly during regular office or business hours.

7. Section 1-212(a), G.S., provides in relevant part: “Any person applying in writing shall receive, promptly upon request, a plain, facsimile, electronic or certified copy of any public record.”

8. It is concluded that the records requested by the complainant are public records within the meaning of §§1-200(5), 1-210(a), and 1-212(a), G.S., to the extent such records exist.

9. It is found that the respondents have a policy, based on safety and security concerns within their correctional institutions, to permit inmates to view video footage only upon court order and as directed by the Attorney General.

10. It is found that there is no court order that requires the respondents to permit the complainant to view the requested recordings, and no one from the Office of the Attorney General has directed the respondents to permit the complainant to view the recordings.

11. Section 1-210(b)(18), G.S., provides in relevant part, that “[n]othing in the Freedom of Information Act shall be construed to require disclosure of:

Records, the disclosure of which the Commissioner of Correction...has reasonable grounds to believe may result in a safety risk, including the risk of harm to any person or the risk of an escape from, or a disorder in, a correctional institution or facility under the supervision of the Department of Correction.... Such records shall include, but are not limited to:

(A) Security manuals, including emergency plans contained or referred to in such security manuals;

(B) Engineering and architectural drawings of correctional institutions or facilities or Whiting Forensic Division facilities;

(C) Operational specifications of security systems utilized by the Department of Correction at any correctional institution or facility or Whiting Forensic Division facilities, except that a general description of any such security system and the cost and quality of such system may be disclosed;

(D) Training manuals prepared for correctional institutions and facilities or Whiting Forensic Division facilities that describe, in any manner, security procedures, emergency plans or security equipment;

(E) Internal security audits of correctional institutions and facilities or Whiting Forensic Division facilities;

(F) Minutes or recordings of staff meetings of the Department of Correction or Whiting Forensic Division facilities, or portions of such minutes or recordings, that contain or reveal information relating to security or other records otherwise exempt from disclosure under this subdivision;

(G) Logs or other documents that contain information on the movement or assignment of inmates or staff at correctional institutions or facilities; and

(H) Records that contain information on contacts between inmates, as defined in section 18-84, and law enforcement officers.

12. It is found that the respondent commissioner believes that disclosure of video recordings made within the institution may reveal camera locations, angles of vision, blind spots, duct work, and other information that may compromise the safety and security of inmates and staff.

13. It is found, based upon the evidence produced at the hearing in this matter, that the Commissioner of Correction has reasonable grounds to believe that disclosure of the video recording, described in paragraph 2, above, may result in a safety risk, within the meaning of §1-210(b)(18), G.S.

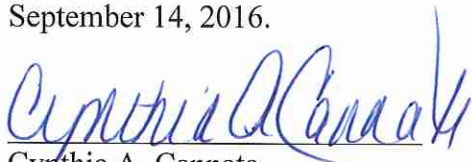
14. It is concluded that §1-210(b)(18), G.S., exempts the records requested by the complainant from mandatory disclosure.

15. It is concluded that the respondents did not violate the FOI Act as alleged.

The following order by the commission is hereby recommended on the basis of the record concerning the above-captioned complaint:

1. The complaint is dismissed.

Approved by Order of the Freedom of Information Commission at its regular meeting of September 14, 2016.



Cynthia A. Cannata  
Acting Clerk of the Commission

PURSUANT TO SECTION 4-180(c), G.S., THE FOLLOWING ARE THE NAMES OF EACH PARTY AND THE MOST RECENT MAILING ADDRESS, PROVIDED TO THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COMMISSION, OF THE PARTIES OR THEIR AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE.

THE PARTIES TO THIS CONTESTED CASE ARE:

Ira Alston #275666  
MacDougall-Walker Correctional Institution  
1153 East Street South  
Suffield, CT 06080

Commissioner, State of Connecticut,  
Department of Correction; and State of  
Connecticut, Department of Correction  
c/o James Neil, Esq.  
24 Wolcott Hill Road  
Wethersfield, CT 06109



Cynthia A. Cannata  
Acting Clerk of the Commission