

PRESS RELEASE

28 September 2020

Ombudsman marks International Right to Know Day

FOI: Its yours, just ask!

Did you know? Eleven years after the implementation of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Law in the Cayman Islands, the government has received more than 6,300 open records requests – and has disclosed public information in roughly two-thirds of those cases.

In 2019 some of those disclosures included information on food inspections, the proposed cruise berthing facility, importation of endangered species, environmental issues, school inspections, employment issues, and more.

The Office of the Ombudsman believes that's reason to celebrate as we mark International Right to Know Day this Monday, 28 September. The FOI Law took effect in Cayman on 5 January 2009, granting individuals the legal right to request information held by public sector entities.

Since then, hundreds of FOI requests have been made each year leading to hundreds of disclosures of public records – either in full or in part. Last year, just more than 400 open records requests were made, about two-thirds of which resulted in the disclosure of information.

“Although responding to FOI requests is the duty of every public sector agency, the Office of the Ombudsman – as the entity that handles appeals in FOI matters – has a keen interest in seeing that this process works and remains fair both to applicants seeking information and to government entities,” said Sandy Hermiston, Cayman Islands Ombudsman. “A record number of FOI appeals was decided by the Ombudsman last year, an indication that this important tool is being used to ensure transparency in government decision-making in our society.”

Simply making an FOI request does not guarantee that the records sought will be released, if they fall under one of the Law's exemptions; more than 100 requests made last year were exempted from release. In general, the FOI Law ensures those requests must receive a government response within 30 days,

“This is an area we would like to see government improve in, as it's taking more than 30 days to respond in 47 per cent of the FOI requests government received last year,” said Deputy Ombudsman Jan Liebaers. “We also encourage government entities to release information proactively on their websites, rather than wait for an FOI request to be made.”

This will be the first time this day is marked since October 2019, when the United National General Assembly proclaimed 28 September as the International Day for Universal Access to Information.



For more information about FOI in the Cayman Islands, please see the report attached to this press release. Individuals wishing to appeal FOI decisions to the Ombudsman may contact our office at 946-6283 or email us at info@ombudsman.ky.