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25-ORD-317

October 16, 2025

In re: Matthew Johnson/Kentucky State Police

Summary: The Kentucky State Police (“KSP”) did not violate the Open Records Act (“the Act”) when it denied a request that did not precisely describe the records requested.

Open Records Decision

Mathew Johnson (“Appellant”) submitted a request to KSP for “records that identify” KSP “sworn and civilian” employees “who were temporarily reassigned between” January 1, 2023, and September 3, 2025. The Appellant further specified that the records he seeks should show the “employee’s name and title”; the “date of reassignment”; and the “post/branch [the employee] was reassigned from and to.” In response, KSP denied the request stating that it does not possess a single record containing the information the Appellant requested and further denied the request to the extent it sought individual personnel records under KRS 61.872(3)(b) because the request did not precisely describe the records sought. This appeal followed.

When a person requests copies of public records under the Act, “[t]he public agency shall mail copies of the public records to a person . . . after he or she precisely describes the public records which are readily available within the public agency.” KRS 61.872(3)(b). A description is precise “if it describes the records in definite, specific, and unequivocal terms.” 98-ORD-17 (internal quotation marks omitted). This standard may not be met when a request does not “describe records by type, origin, county, or any identifier other than relation to a subject.” 20-ORD-017 (quoting 13-ORD-077). In particular, requests for any and all records “related to a broad and ill-defined topic” generally fail to precisely describe the records. 22-ORD-182; *see also* 21-ORD-034 (finding a request for any and all records relating to “change of duties,” “freedom of speech,” or “usage of signs” did not precisely describe the records); *but see Univ. of Ky. v. Kernel Press, Inc.*, 620 S.W.3d 43, 48 n.2 (Ky. 2021)

(holding a request was proper when it sought “all records detailing [the] resignation” of a named employee).

Here, the Appellant has asked for “records that identify” a particular category of KSP employee: those who were temporarily reassigned to a different post or branch between January 1, 2023, and September 3, 2025. But KSP has explained that it does not possess a single list of such employees. Rather, the only responsive records in KSP’s possession are “individual personnel records that may contain such information.”

According to KSP, a “manual review of each individual employee’s personnel file is the only means by which to determine whether that employee (sworn or civilian) was temporarily reassigned in the relevant period, *i.e.*, their file included any existing record that contained some or all of the requested information.” Here, to locate responsive records, KSP would need to search approximately 3,500 personnel files. The Office has previously found that a request for records which can only be fulfilled by manual review of all its individual files does not precisely describe the public records sought. *See, e.g.*, 23-ORD-066 (implicating the review of 8,000 files); 25-ORD-051 (implicating the review of 19,000 files). Thus, the Appellant’s request did not “precisely describe[] public records which are readily available within the public agency,” as required by KRS 61.872(3)(b). Accordingly, KSP did not violate the Act when it denied the request.

A party aggrieved by this decision may appeal it by initiating an action in the appropriate circuit court under KRS 61.880(5) and KRS 61.882 within 30 days from the date of this decision. Under KRS 61.880(3), the Attorney General shall be notified of any action in circuit court, but shall not be named as a party in that action or in any subsequent proceedings. The Attorney General will accept notice of the complaint emailed to OAGAppeals@ky.gov.

**Russell Coleman
Attorney General**

/s/ Zachary M. Zimmerer
Zachary M. Zimmerer
Assistant Attorney General

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Distributed to:

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