

MARYLAND PUBLIC INFORMATION ACT (PIA)
The public's right to information about government activities lies at the heart of a democratic government.

Mediation Metric Report of the Public Access Ombudsman

2020 1st Quarter Report
 January to March 31, 2020



1st Quarter Report 2020

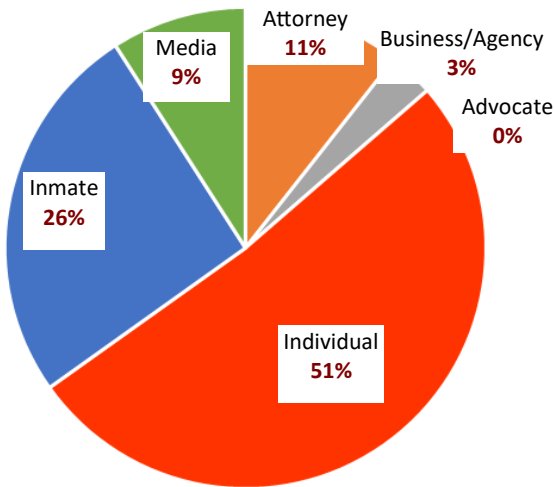
122 1st quarter 2020

- ◆ 66 -Mediation requests
- ◆ 56 -Other/"help-desk" inquiries

The Big Picture: Mediation Matters!

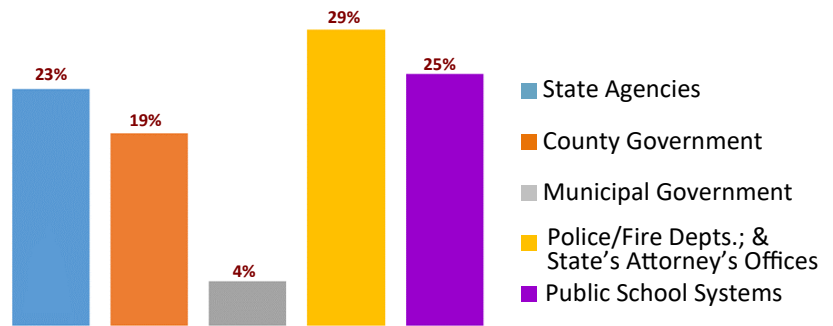
Early resolution of disputes saves time and resources and increases public knowledge and awareness of the PIA process. Mediation is entirely voluntary, confidential, and in many cases doesn't require an attorney.

Requestors

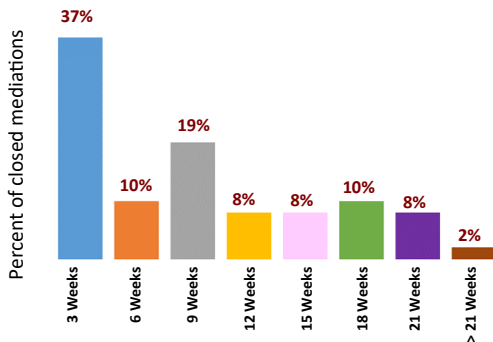


Agencies

44 unique agencies participated in new mediation matters with the PIA Ombudsman in the first quarter of 2020. Agency jurisdictions include state level, **9** different counties and Baltimore City, and **4** municipalities.



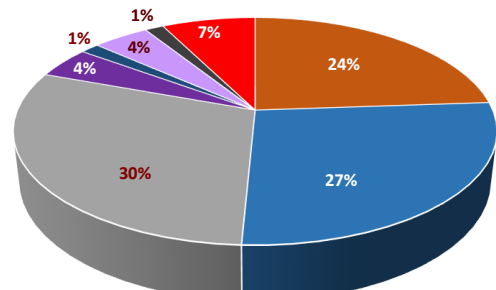
Length of Time to Close



37% of the cases are resolved within 3 weeks and **47%** by 6 weeks.

PIA Disputes

As described by the requestor.



Total Mediation Cases, as of March 31, 2020	
Carry over from 2019	46
New/Incoming cases in 2020	66
Total Number of Mediation cases	112
Mediation cases open	62
Total Mediation cases Closed	50

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<http://piaombuds.maryland.gov>

2020 Legislative Session

Multiple bills were introduced during the 2020 Legislative session that would have amended the PIA. The session was terminated early due to the COVID-19 State of Emergency and none of the PIA bills passed, including HB 502/SB 590, which was based on the recommendations of the Ombudsman and PIA Compliance Board in their joint *Report on the PIA* published December 27, 2019.

Open Matters: Blog of the Public Access Ombudsman

- **Importance of Accurate PIA Custodian Contact Information.** 04/06/2020
- **Guidance to Governmental Custodians Regarding PIA Timelines during the COVID-19 Crisis.** 03/23/2020
- **Ombudsman and members of the PIA Compliance Board unanimously support HB 502 / SB 590.** 02/14/2020
- **Records Management and the Public Information Act.** 01/07/2020

2020 Ombudsman's Selected Tweets —

- ◆ **Latest issue of Open Matters**, blog of the MD Public Access Ombudsman, offers advice to records custodians pertaining to meeting PIA deadlines in this time of Covid-19 state of emergency. 3/23/20
- ◆ **Sunshine Week 2020.** Government Transparency In the News. Sunshine Week in the Age of Social Distancing. Posted In About FOIA, About OGIS, 3/20/20
- ◆ There are resources available on the Maryland Department of Health website. Maryland Department of Health - Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Information. 3/16/20
- ◆ **Coronavirus Notice.** The Ombudsman's office is working entirely remotely during this state emergency. While we are attempting to conduct business as usual by remote means, it is nonetheless slowing us down in our responses to inquiries. 3/16/20

Outreach 2020 & 2019

Presentations, Workshops, Trainings, and Other Outreach 2020

Due to the COVID-19 State of Emergency, the Public Access Ombudsman's Office was required to postpone three in-person trainings scheduled in the first quarter of 2020. The Ombudsman's Office plans to create virtual /online training modules on the PIA for future use.

2019

- PIA Compliance Board, Discussion of PIA Research Report, December 17
- PIA Compliance Board, Discussion of Preliminary Findings for PIA Research Report, November 5
- Maryland Association of Counties, County Attorneys, November 13
- Maryland Association of Counties, Winter Conference, November 20
- Wicomico County Public Schools, October 17
- Maryland State Bar Association, October 25
- Local Government Insurance Trust, October 31

Select Publications

- **Final Report on the Public Information Act.** Submitted by the PIA Compliance Board and the Public Access Ombudsman pursuant to Committee Narrative in the Report on the Fiscal 2020 State Operating Budget and the State Capital Budget. December 27, 2019
- **Report on the Public Information Act: Preliminary Findings and Recommendations.** Submitted by the PIA Compliance Board and the Public Access Ombudsman. November 6, 2019
- **Where Are My Records?** Office of the Public Defender, Post Conviction Newsletter, Summer 2019
- **Public Access Ombudsman's Interpretive Regulations:** <https://tinyurl.com/y2cuqp55>, June 2019
- **Ombudsman comments, included as an Appendix to the 2019 Annual Report of the PIA Compliance Board.** September 2019
- **HB 1105 Report: Ombudsman's Report Concerning the Howard County Public School System's Handling of Requests Under the Public Information Act.** December 30, 2016

RESOURCES/LINKS

- ◆ **Public Access Ombudsman:** www.piaombuds.maryland.gov
- ◆ **MD Office of the Attorney General—PIA Manual** www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/OpenGov/piamanual.aspx (includes Appendix J: List of Public Record Custodians)
- ◆ **MD State Archives:** a resource for record management and retention practices. www.msa.maryland.gov
- ◆ **Office of Government Information Services:** www.archives.gov/ogis
- ◆ **Federal FOIA (Freedom of Information Act):** www.foia.gov
- ◆ **DC Office of Open Government:** www.open-dc.gov/office-open-government

