

Anonymous Citizen Sues Madison School District to Obtain Records

District violates state law by insisting requesters identify themselves

Today, the Wisconsin Transparency Project, on behalf of an anonymous Madison resident using the pseudonym John Doe, sued the Madison Metropolitan School District in Dane County Circuit Court. The suit alleges that the District is unlawfully insisting that Doe identify themselves before it will turn over records.

Doe has filed a number of open record requests over the last four months with the District using the online public records database and portal muckrock.com. MuckRock allows its users to send anonymous requests through its website and use the website to receive, track, and share the records provided. Doe's requests ran the gamut from routine weekly board updates to grant applications and annual School Improvement Plans. The district refused every request because of Doe's unwillingness to be identified.

State law is perfectly clear that requesters may remain anonymous: "no request . . . may be refused because the person making the request is unwilling to be identified or to state the purpose of the request." Wis. Stat. § 19.35(1)(i). The District claims Doe must identify themselves so it can decide whether releasing the records would pose a "safety concern," but the law does not allow that excuse.

For questions or a copy of the complaint, contact Tom Kamenick, President and Founder of the Wisconsin Transparency Project.

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