



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CITIZEN ACTION DEFENSE FUND WINS PUBLIC RECORDS SUIT AGAINST GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

Olympia, Washington — March 31, 2023 —Today, the Citizen Action Defense Fund (CADF) won its lawsuit against the Governor's Office for violations of the public records act for refusing to hand over initial offers in collective bargaining negotiations even after the parties had signed agreements. In addition to awarding attorney's fees and costs, Thurston County Superior Court Judge Mary Sue Wilson added an additional penalty of \$6 per day although she reserved ruling on final amounts that will be determined at another hearing scheduled for April 28th.

The suit was originally filed last December against the Office of Financial Management (OFM), which is part of the Governor's office, for failing to provide public records in connection with the Governor's "secret" negotiations with public sector employee unions last year that led to biennial agreements with \$997 million in increased salary and benefits for state employees.

Last year, the Governor's OFM began negotiations with government unions on contracts for the next biennial (2023-25) budget cycle. The behind closed doors agreements, that were finalized and signed by the parties, resulted in nearly ten-figure increases for public sector union membership in salary and benefits. The agreements were politically controversial as the unions made significant political donations to the Governor and his allies in the months leading up to the November 2022 elections.

On October 20, 2022, CADF learned that the Governor's OFM was refusing to provide copies of the state and unions' original offers in the negotiations until after the Legislature approves the entire General Fund state budget during the current 2023 session and the Governor signs it into law. CADF submitted a new request pointing out that the public records act contains no such limitations on public records. OFM continued to withhold the documents.

"I am very pleased at the Court's ruling today. As I argued to the judge, the Public Records Act is a cornerstone of representative government because it ensures that the people can hold their public officials and institutions accountable," said Jackson Maynard, Executive Director of CADF who also served as counsel on the case. "The governing majority in Olympia and Seattle has been called into question the last several months over the failure to retain and disclose public records to the press and the citizens of our state. The court's decision today is a win not only for CADF but also the effort to promote transparency, which is the hallmark of our democracy. OFM should not be able to rewrite the law to shield important information from taxpayers to suit the Governor's political needs."

CADF is an independent, nonprofit organization based in Washington state that supports and pursues strategic, high-impact litigation in cases to advance free markets, restrain government overreach, or defend constitutional rights. The government watchdog nonprofit files lawsuits, represents affected parties, and intervenes in cases when the state enacts laws that violate the state or federal constitutions, when government officials take actions that infringe upon the First Amendment or other constitutional rights, or when agencies promulgate rules in violation of state law.

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For more information:

Jackson Maynard
Executive Director
Office: (360) 878-9206
Cell: (850) 519-3495
jackson@citizenactiondefense.org