

THIN LINE SOFTWARE

TEXAS POLICE RECORDS GUIDE

Texas Police Records Guide for Residents

How Texas residents request police and crash reports, use the Public Information Act, understand common redactions and fees, and handle local records checks, non-emergency reporting, and complaints-with links to official state sources.

Originally published: October 2026 · Last reviewed: October 2026

Plain-language guide for Texas residents on police reports, crash reports (CR-3), open records requests, local clearance letters, and DPS criminal history-with links to official sources.

About this guide

This guide explains how Texas residents usually obtain police reports, crash reports, and related information from law enforcement agencies. It does not cover traffic tickets or municipal court procedures-see the companion Texas Municipal Court Guide for Residents.

Important: This page is general information, not legal advice. Procedures differ by city, county, and agency. Contact the police department or sheriff's office that holds the record when you need local steps.

How Texas open records work

Most records held by Texas police departments are governed by the Texas Public Information Act (PIA), Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code.

What the PIA covers

- The PIA gives the public the right to request access to information a governmental body already has in its records.
- A request must be in writing and sent to the governmental body you believe maintains the information.
- The request must seek existing records. Agencies are generally not required to answer general questions, perform legal research, or create new documents.

Official overview: [How to Request Public Information](#)

Statute: [Texas Government Code Chapter 552](#)

How to submit a written request

Since September 1, 2019, a PIA request must be delivered by one of these methods (unless the governmental body has approved another):

1. United States mail
2. Electronic mail
3. Hand delivery
4. Any other method approved by that governmental body

See Texas Government Code § 552.234.

Practical tips:

- Send the request to the agency's public information officer (PIO) or the contact on the agency's open-government notice.
- Describe records specifically: date, location, report number, names, and record type.
- Keep a copy of your request and proof of delivery.

Timelines: production vs. attorney general review

Topic	What Texas law generally requires
Producing records	Public information must be made available promptly (without undue delay).
If production will take longer than 10 business days	The governmental body must notify you when the information will be available.
If the body wants to withhold information	In most cases, it must ask the Texas Attorney General for a ruling within 10 business days after receiving your written request and must send you required notices.

See Overview of the Public Information Act and Texas Government Code § 552.301.

Open Government Hotline: 1-877-OPEN TEX (1-877-673-6839) - Open Government Resources

Information that is often withheld or redacted

- Ongoing investigations - Texas Government Code § 552.108. Certain basic information about an arrest or crime may still be required to be released when applicable.
- Closed investigations without conviction - Other subsections of § 552.108 may apply.
- Juvenile law enforcement records - Generally confidential under the Family Code (for example, Texas Family Code § 58.007), incorporated into the PIA through § 552.101.
- Personal identifying information - For example, driver's license numbers under § 552.130.

OAG summary: Open Records Memorandum Rulings - § 552.108

Police reports and offense reports**Terms residents use**

- Offense / incident report - documents a call, offense, or arrest (labels vary by agency).
- Supplemental reports - additional reports in the same case.
- 911 or dispatch records - separate records; request them explicitly if needed.

Who to contact

Send a written PIA request to the law enforcement agency that created or maintains the report-usually the city police department or county sheriff's office that responded.

What to include

- Your name and contact information

- Whether you want to inspect or receive copies
- Report number, date, location, and names (if known)
- The type of record requested

After you submit

The agency may release the record (with lawful redactions), ask you to clarify the request, provide a cost estimate, or notify you that it asked the Attorney General whether information may be withheld.

Crash reports (Texas Peace Officer's Crash Report, CR-3)

TxDOT custodian

TxDOT is custodian of crash reports for crashes investigated by Texas law enforcement on public roadways.

Overview: Crash reports and records (TxDOT)

Buying a CR-3 online

- Purchase system: Crash Report Online Purchase System
- Fees listed by TxDOT: \$6 regular copy; \$8 certified copy (plus possible online surcharge and card processing fees).
- Delivery is typically by email after purchase.

Release is governed by Texas Transportation Code § 550.065. Requestors who do not qualify for an unredacted copy may receive a redacted report.

Local police role

The official CR-3 is obtained through TxDOT. Dash cam video, photos, field notes, and other scene materials are held by the investigating agency, not TxDOT-request those from the police department or sheriff's office.

Retention

TxDOT retains crash records for the previous 10 full calendar years plus the current calendar year.

Fees for copies and public information

General PIA charges

Copy charges must follow Office of the Attorney General cost rules (and specific statutes for particular records). Inspection is generally free except in limited situations.

OAG hub: Charges for Public Information

Official materials commonly cite, for paper copies:

- \$0.10 per page (standard copies)
- Labor and overhead in some larger or archived requests
- Written cost estimates when charges are expected to exceed \$40

See the Public Information Act Handbook (PDF).

Cost Hotline: 1-888-OR-COSTS (1-888-672-6787)

Crash report fees

CR-3 fees are set under Transportation Code § 550.065 and published on TxDOT's crash reports page-not the general PIA per-page schedule.

Local records checks and clearance letters

Some employers or programs ask for a local police letter about arrests or offenses in that jurisdiction only.

- This is a local service based on that agency's records, not a statewide criminal history.
- It is not a substitute for a Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) criminal history record check.
- Fees, forms, and wait times vary by department.
- Contact the department records or administrative division.

Do not expect a local police department to provide FBI NCIC, Texas TCIC, or other criminal justice information (CJI) query results to residents through an open-records request. Those systems are restricted to criminal justice agencies for authorized law-enforcement purposes under FBI CJIS Security Policy and Texas law. If you need statewide criminal history, use DPS channels below-not a records clerk at a city police department.

Police reports vs. statewide criminal history (DPS)

What you need	Where to go
A specific incident report	Written PIA request to the local agency that holds the report
Texas computerized criminal history (CCH)	Texas DPS Crime Records under Government Code Chapter 411

DPS resources:

- Crime Records (DPS)
- Crime Records Services FAQs
- Criminal History Name Search (CRD)

DPS explains (FAQ):

- A fingerprint-based search is the most accurate way to match a person to a record.
- A name-based search can match the wrong person or miss records.
- DPS states the fee for a name-based check is \$10.00 if done offline through DPS; for online name-search fees, DPS directs you to the Criminal History Conviction Name Search site.
- DPS CCH reflects information submitted by Texas criminal justice agencies; it may not include every arrest nationwide.

Filing a non-emergency police report

When no emergency response is needed:

- Call the agency non-emergency number, or
- Use online reporting if the department offers it.

Do not use 9-1-1 for routine report filing.

Traffic tickets and municipal court

If your question is about paying a citation, court dates, deferred disposition, or a driving safety course, use the Texas Municipal Court Guide for Residents-not the police records office. (Texas justice and municipal court procedures are in Code of Criminal Procedure Chapter 45A, recodified effective January 1, 2025.)

Compliments, concerns, and complaints

Local: Ask the department how to file a citizen complaint or commendation (often internal affairs or the chief's office).

TCOLE (state licensing): For matters within the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement's jurisdiction (licensing, training, certification, appointment, or covered criminal offenses), see TCOLE Complaint Procedures. TCOLE often refers complaints about rudeness or investigation quality to the appointing agency first.

Oversight: TCOLE notes you may contact the agency's governing body (for example, city council) if a local complaint is unresolved.

Questions to ask your local police department

1. Who handles open records requests-records, or a city PIO/legal office?
2. What email or mailing address is used for written PIA requests?
3. Is there a request form on your website?
4. What ID or proof of interest is required to release a report?
5. What is the typical turnaround for a routine offense report?
6. How are copy charges calculated, and when will I get a cost estimate?
7. Can you provide the crash report ID for a crash you investigated?
8. If information is withheld, will you tell me whether you requested an Attorney General ruling?
9. Do you provide local clearance letters? What is the fee and wait time?
10. How do I file a non-emergency report (phone or online)?
11. How do I file a complaint or commendation about an officer?

Frequently asked questions

Do I need a lawyer to request a police report?

No. Anyone may submit a written public information request. Consider legal advice if records are withheld or you are involved in litigation.

How long will I wait?

Agencies must respond promptly and notify you if release will take more than 10 business days. Attorney General review adds time when an agency seeks to withhold information.

Can I get someone else's arrest report?

You may request information the agency holds, but exceptions often limit release to unrelated requestors. Agencies may release certain records only to victims, defendants, or authorized representatives.

Is a police report the same as a criminal record?

No. A police report describes one incident. DPS maintains statewide criminal history (CCH) under Texas law.

Can the police department run a "national background check" for me?

Generally no for public walk-in service. Nationwide NCIC and similar CJIS data are for authorized criminal justice use. For Texas criminal history, use DPS; for FBI identity history, federal channels (such as FBI-approved fingerprinting) apply-not a local PIA request.

Where do I get a CR-3?

Use TxDOT's Crash Report Online Purchase System and see TxDOT crash reports and records.

Who do I call if the agency will not release a record?

Contact the agency PIO, then the OAG Open Government Hotline: 1-877-673-6839. For billing disputes, 1-888-672-6787.

Disclaimer

This guide is not legal advice. Laws and agency policies change. For charges, civil claims, insurance, immigration, or employment screening, consult a qualified attorney or the official agency that holds the record. Contact your local police department or sheriff's office for steps in your area.

For agencies: link to this guide

Suggested anchor text: Texas police records guide for residents.

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  For help requesting police reports, crash reports (CR-3), and open records in Texas, see
  <a href="https://thinline.software/resources/texas-police-records-guide">
    Texas police records guide for residents
  </a>
  (general information; not legal advice).
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Published by Thin Line Software, Lubbock, Texas.

Generated from the Thin Line Software resource library. Read this guide online: <https://thinline.software/resources/texas-police-records-guide>