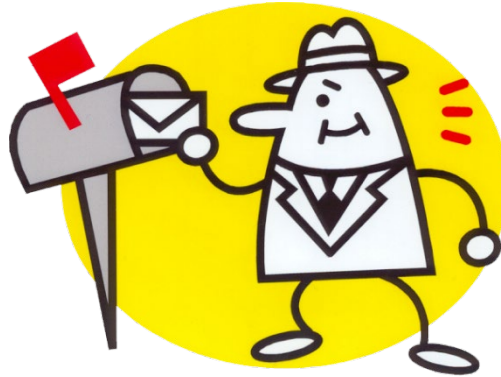


# LEGAL MAILBAG – OCTOBER 2, 2025



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*The “Legal Mailbag Question of the Week” is a regular feature of the CAS Weekly NewsBlast. We invite readers to submit short, law-related questions of practical concern to school administrators. Each week, we will select a question and publish an answer. While these answers cannot be considered formal legal advice, they may be of help to you and your colleagues. We may edit your questions, and we will not identify the authors. Please submit your questions to: [legalmailbag@casciac.org](mailto:legalmailbag@casciac.org).*

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Dear Legal Mailbag,

I am the principal at an elementary school, and earlier this week I received an anonymous letter alleging that a teacher in my school is shirking his teaching responsibilities by constantly being on his cellphone and assigning seatwork to his fourth grade students.

Given that anonymous letters are inherently untrustworthy, I just put the letter in the drawer of my desk. But now I find myself walking by the teacher’s classroom more often to keep an eye on him. Moreover, when I see the teacher going about his business each day, I wonder if I should tell him about this anonymous letter.

Should I just throw the letter out and forget about it?

Signed,  
*What To Do?*

Dear What:

If someone were making allegations about you to your boss, wouldn't you want to know? Legal Mailbag suggests that you share the anonymous letter with the teacher with one exception. In rare circumstances, an anonymous letter could invite district officials to conduct a quiet investigation to see what is going on before tipping an employee off by sharing such a letter.

In any event, Legal Mailbag must caution you against throwing the letter out. This letter is a "public record" under the Freedom of Information Act, which provides:

"Public records or files" means any recorded data or information relating to the conduct of the public's business prepared, owned, used, received or retained by a public agency, or to which a public agency is entitled to receive a copy by law or contract under section [1-218](#), whether such data or information be handwritten, typed, tape-recorded, videotaped, printed, photostated, photographed or recorded by any other method.

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 1-200(5). Given this broad definition, it is clear that even anonymous letters that a public agency receives are public records.

Simply throwing the letter out is not an appropriate option. There are specific retention requirements for public records under Connecticut law and related procedures for destroying such records. Destroying a public record without following those procedures is a criminal offense. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 1-240(a) provides that

Any person who wilfully, knowingly and with intent to do so, destroys, mutilates or otherwise disposes of any public record without the approval required under section 1-18 or unless pursuant to chapter 47 or 871, or who alters any public record, shall be guilty of a class A misdemeanor and each such occurrence shall constitute a separate offense.

Legal Mailbag does not wish to cause you unnecessary anxiety, but it is important to be aware of these requirements that apply to public records.

Finally, there are related issues if the district receives an FOIA request for such a letter. The Freedom of Information Commission ruled many years ago that letters complaining about teachers are public records subject to disclosure. *Schiller v. Meriden Board of Education*, Docket #FIC 87-83 (August 23, 1989). However, Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-214 requires that public agencies notify employees if they receive an FOIA request for records contained in their personnel files. If the teacher objects to the disclosure of the letter upon receiving such notification and the district concludes that there is a reasonable basis for that objection, the district may withhold the letter from disclosure. The requesting party may then file a complaint with the Freedom of Information Commission, which will rule on the objection and hold either that confidentiality may be maintained or that the record should be disclosed.

Disclosure of an anonymous letter of complaint seems particularly unfair. If disclosure of an anonymous letter would harm the reputation of a teacher, immediate disclosure may not be required. Records contained in personnel, medical or similar files are subject to disclosure unless such disclosure “would constitute an invasion of personal privacy.” Conn. Gen. Stat. § 1-210(b)(2). The Connecticut Supreme Court has interpreted this exemption to apply only when (1) the information does not pertain to matters of legitimate concern to the public, and (2) its disclosure would be highly offensive to a reasonable person. *Perkins v. Freedom of Information Commission*, 228 Conn. 158 (1993). Nonetheless, depending on the allegations made in an anonymous letter, a good case can be made that withholding that letter from disclosure meets these standards. In such a case, the procedures outlined above will apply, and the Freedom of Information Commission will make the final decision.