

**IN THE CHANCERY COURT FOR DAVIDSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE  
TWENTIETH JUDICIAL DISTRICT, AT NASHVILLE**

***THE TENNESSEAN*; RACHEL  
WEGNER; and TODD GARDENHIRE in  
his individual capacity,**

**Plaintiffs/Petitioners,**

**v.**

**METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF  
NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON  
COUNTY,**

**Defendant/Respondent.**

**Case No. \_\_\_\_\_  
[Possibly to be consolidated with  
Case No. 23-0538-III and 23-0542-III]**

**COMPLAINT AND PETITION FOR ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS**

Plaintiffs/Petitioners have requested access to public records, some created by and others obtained from third parties by the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department (“Metro Police Department”) of the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County (“Metropolitan Government”), but the requests have been denied. These records pertain to murders at a local private school, The Covenant School, in Nashville, Tennessee, on March 27, 2023. On that date, an individual named Audrey Hale, who also went by the name Aiden Hale (“Hale”), shot Hale’s way into The Covenant School and began shooting and killing staff and students of that school. Officers of the Metro Police Department quickly responded. Hale was killed in an exchange of gunfire with police officers. The Metro Police Department acknowledges that it believes Hale acted alone. Petitioners submit that there is no pending criminal investigation. There is no criminal suspect to investigate. Public records requests made by the Plaintiffs/Petitioners have been denied, with the sole excuse given by Metro Government for non-disclosure being Rule 16 of the Tennessee Rules of Criminal Procedure.

Plaintiffs/Petitioners file this Complaint/Petition pursuant to the Tennessee Public Records Act (“TPRA”), Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 10-7-501 *et seq.*, for access to public records which are within the custody, possession or control of the Metropolitan Government. As grounds for this Complaint/Petition, the Plaintiffs/Petitioners state as follows:

1. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this action. Venue is proper in Davidson County, Tennessee.

2. Plaintiff/Petitioner *The Tennessean* is a Nashville-based regional daily newspaper which is operated by Gannett GP Media, Inc. Multiple public records requests were made by Rachel Wegner, a Tennessee citizen and Davidson County resident, in both her official capacity as a reporter for *The Tennessean* and in her individual capacity.

3. Plaintiff/Petitioner Todd Gardenhire is a citizen of Tennessee and Hamilton County resident. Mr. Gardenhire is the Chair of the Tennessee Senate Judiciary Committee. He pursues this case in his individual capacity as a citizen of the State of Tennessee.

4. Defendant/Respondent Metropolitan Government is a governmental entity which is required to comply with the TPRA, Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 10-7-501 *et seq.* One of Metropolitan Government’s departments or divisions is the Metro Police Department. Officers of the Metro Police Department quickly responded to the gunfire at The Covenant School. Multiple officers entered the school and began the process of clearing students and staff. Two officers confronted Hale, and, while under fire, shot and killed Hale. Since that time, the actions of the Metro Police Department officers have been characterized in *The Tennessean* and elsewhere as heroic.

5. On information and belief, the Metro Police Department created records and also gathered information from a variety of sources, including journals from Hale’s car and Hale’s parents’ home, together with a suicide note.

6. The Metro Police Department produced a video for public release which included portions of body cam footage from various police officers, including the two officers who returned fire against Hale.

7. The murders on the campus of The Covenant School have resulted in significant public interest. These killings are part of a broader public debate about shootings at locations including schools, movie theatres, nightclubs, and shopping malls.

8. In this particular instance, debate has arisen regarding Hale's motivations, goals, planning, and acquisition of firearms while under mental health treatment. For example, did Hale attack a Christian school because of its religious affiliation? Or because of the conservative views of the denomination of which The Covenant's School's sponsoring church is a participating congregation? Or because Hale hated the school that Hale once attended? Or because Hale had a grudge against some employee or administrator at the school? What do Hale's autopsy/toxicology tests show, and are they connected to the shootings? What do Hale's records show that might be of assistance to the Tennessee special legislative session scheduled to take place in August 2023? What do these records reveal which may help to avoid school shootings in the future? These and other questions have caused debate and intense public interest.

9. School shootings, such as those The Covenant School, have led to rallies and protests in 2023, not only at Legislative Plaza in Nashville, but also within the Chambers of the Tennessee House of Representatives. These rallies and protests have resulted in national media attention.

10. On April 27, 2023, the Metro Police Department, through its Public Information Office, announced that it would be releasing records. *See* Adrian Mojica, *Nashville Mass*

*Shooter's Manifesto Being Reviewed for Public Release*, KHQA (Apr. 27, 2023, 11:22 AM), <https://tinyurl.com/KHQARel>.

11. Tennessee Governor Bill Lee has taken an interest in school shootings, and in particular, the murders that took place at The Covenant School. On Thursday, April 27, 2023, Governor Lee released a statement on social media that he had been assured by Metro Police Department Chief Drake the information requested by various public records would be “released to the public very soon.”

12. On Friday, April 28, 2023, the Metro Police Department denied the public records request of Michael Leahy and *The Tennessee Star*, citing Tenn. R. Crim. P. 16 as the sole basis for refusal.

13. On Friday, April 28, 2023, the Metro Police Department changed course 180 degrees and refused to produce any more records. Chief Drake’s assurance of disclosure to Governor Lee on April 27 was reversed.

14. Tennessee Governor Bill Lee has announced a special session of the Tennessee General Assembly, beginning August 21, 2023, during which the Legislature will reconvene and consider new legislation regarding public safety. The records requested by the Plaintiffs/Petitioners will contribute to the discussion and debate which is anticipated at the Tennessee General Assembly.

15. On or about May 15, 2023, sixty-six of the Tennessee House representatives delivered a letter to Metro Police Chief Drake requesting the release of records, some of which are the subject of this Complaint/Petition. A true and correct copy of this letter is attached as Exhibit 1.

16. The result of the positions taken by the Metropolitan Government and the proposed Intervenor could be the disruption of the Special Session of the Tennessee General Assembly and the hoped-for gun legislation.

17. Plaintiffs/Petitioners seek to bring to light additional facts regarding this incident, societal and mental health issues, and issues regarding firearms more broadly, which have not yet been revealed through other means.

18. The Tennessee General Assembly has stated its intention that the TPRA be read broadly in order to promote transparency. The statute provides: “All state, county and municipal records shall, at all times during business hours, . . . be open for personal inspection by any citizen of this state, and those in charge of the records shall not refuse such right of inspection to any citizen, unless otherwise provided by state law.” Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-503(2)(A).

19. Public records subject to the Act include “all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, photographs, microfilms, electronic data processing files and output, films, sound recordings, or other material, regardless of physical form or characteristics made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any governmental agency.” Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-301(6). “Given this definition, the Public Records Act has been described as an ‘all encompassing legislative attempt to cover all printed material created or received by government in its official capacity.’” *Schneider v. City of Jackson*, 226 S.W.3d 332, 339 (Tenn. 2007) (quoting *Griffin v. City of Knoxville*, 821 S.W.2d 921, 923 (Tenn. 1991)).

20. Metropolitan Government is the creator and/or custodian of the records Plaintiffs/Petitioners seek.

21. *The Tennessean* has submitted multiple public records requests to the Metro Police Department through its reporting staff for documents relating to the shootings at The Covenant School. Some requests have been fulfilled. Multiple requests have been denied. Attached as Exhibit 2 is a summary of the requests of *The Tennessean* which, to date, have been denied and which are the subject of this Complaint and Petition. The sole reason given by the Metropolitan Government for denying *The Tennessean*'s requests is Tenn. R. Crim. P. 16. A copy of one of Metro's denials is attached as Exhibit 3.

22. On April 12, 2023, Senator Gardenhire submitted a request asking for "a copy of the following document: the manifesto and journals left by Audrey Hale prior to the shooting at The Covenant School." Senator Gardenhire sought the documents for "research" in "writing new laws regarding school safety." Attached as Exhibit 4 is a true and correct copy of Senator Gardenhire's request.

23. On April 24, 2023, the Metro Police Department denied Senator Gardenhire's request on the ground that "[t]hese items remain relevant to an open criminal investigation," citing "Rule 16 of the Tennessee Rules of Criminal Procedure." Attached as Exhibit 5 is a true and correct copy of the Metro Police Department's denial of Senator Gardenhire's request.

24. Also on April 24, 2023, undersigned counsel sent a letter to the Metro Police Department and Metro Legal to reconsider its denial of Ms. Wegner's public records request. Attached as Exhibit 6 is a true and correct copy of this letter. The Metro Police Department did not modify its denial.

25. The State of Tennessee does not recognize a law enforcement investigative exception to the TPRA. In prior years, law enforcement agencies have sought to establish an exception to the TPRA for records pertaining to law enforcement investigations. In *Schneider v.*

*City of Jackson*, the Tennessee Supreme Court stated that “none of the[] express exceptions [to the TPRA] incorporate the law enforcement privilege” and “the law enforcement privilege has not previously been adopted as a common law privilege in Tennessee.” *Schneider*, 226 S.W.3d at 343-44. As the Court was “unwilling[] to judicially adopt public policy exceptions to the Public Records Act,” it found that “the law enforcement privilege is not a ‘state law’ exception to the Public Records Act.” *Id.* at 344.

26. Rule 16 of the Tennessee Rules of Criminal Procedure governs discovery in state criminal cases. Tenn. R. Crim. P. 16(a)(2) generally prohibits “the discovery or inspection of reports, memoranda, or other internal state documents made by the district attorney general or other state agents or law enforcement officers in connection with investigating or prosecuting the case.” Tenn. R. Crim. P. 16(a)(2) is a “work product” rule, protecting against the disclosure of mental impressions, conclusions, and legal theories of the pending case. *Wilson v. State*, 367 S.W.3d 229, 236 (Tenn. 2012); *Swift v. Campbell*, 159 S.W.3d 565, 572-73 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2004).

27. On information and belief, no open criminal investigation regarding The Covenant School murders is pending. Hale is dead. Metropolitan Government cannot prosecute a dead person. These Petitioners submit that the Metropolitan Government cannot establish the existence of an open criminal investigation.

28. In addition, the exception to the TPRA offered by Tenn. R. Crim. P. 16 is waivable. On multiple occasions, the Metro Police Department has released videos of crimes and requested the assistance of media entities to identify the suspect. The Metro Police Department released body cam footage relating to the Covenant School shootings.

29. Since the murders at The Covenant School, law enforcement officials have made comments to media outlets in briefings and press releases concerning information contained in the

records Plaintiffs/Petitioners have requested. These Petitioners submit that these comments have confirmed that there is not a pending criminal investigation related to the shootings.

30. Because there is no pending criminal investigation, Tenn. R. Crim. P. 16 and the *Tennessean* case cited by the Metro Police Department as grounds for denial of the public records requests are inapplicable. Rather, this case is controlled by the Tennessee Supreme Court's earlier decision in *Memphis Publishing Company v. Holt*, 710 SW2d 513 (Tenn. 1986), in which the Court held that Rule 16 was not applicable because there was no pending or contemplated criminal action due to the fact that the perpetrators of the unlawful activity had been killed in the police shoot-out.

31. The TPRA provides that "the [written] response [to a public records request] **shall** include the basis for the denial." Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-503(a)(2)(B)(ii) (emphasis added). The TPRA further provides: "The burden of proof for justification of nondisclosure of records sought shall be upon the official of and/or designee of the official of those records and the justification for the nondisclosure must be shown by a preponderance of the evidence." Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-505(c).

32. The sole reason given by the Metro Police Department for denial of the Plaintiffs/Petitioners' TPRA requests is Tenn. R. Crim. P. 16. Metropolitan Government/Metro Police Department should be barred and/or estopped from claiming other so-called exemptions not included in their first denial(s). The TPRA does not provide for, nor does it permit, governmental entities to "make up" additional TPRA exceptions "on the fly" in response to a TPRA lawsuit. Metropolitan Government should be limited to the sole reason it gave in refusing Plaintiffs/Petitioners' TPRA requests.

33. On information and belief, the Metropolitan Government has communicated with representatives of The Covenant School, the Covenant Presbyterian Church, and/or parents or



relatives of murder victims on the subject of the requests it has received from multiple TPRA requestors. On information and belief, Metropolitan Government has invited intervention by third parties.

34. To date, upon information and belief, motions to “intervene” have been filed by Covenant Presbyterian Church, The Covenant School, and a group of unnamed parents. The gist of the intervention motions is to object to the production by Metropolitan Government of records which the proposed intervenors perceive as having been requested by one or more TPRA requestors. The motions to intervene are, in essence, “reverse” public records requests seeking to prohibit or enjoin the disclosure of public records. Intervention by these third parties is not provided for under the TPRA. The intervention requests impede the Plaintiffs/Petitioners’ rights under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and Article I, Sections 19 and 23 of the Tennessee Constitution to the right to free speech (including newsgathering and publication) and right to petition government, in violation of the Tennessee Public Participation Act (“TPPA”). Petitioners submit that the proposed intervenors lack standing to intervene in this case.

35. Defendant/Respondent has willfully violated the TPRA and is liable for all reasonable attorneys’ fees and costs.

36. Plaintiffs/Petitioners reserve all rights and claims under the TPRA and TPPA against Defendant/Respondent and/or any proposed intervenors.

**WHEREFORE**, Plaintiffs/Petitioners pray:

1. That process issue and be served upon Defendant/Respondent;
2. That the Court schedule a show cause hearing ordering Defendant/Respondent to immediately appear and show cause (*see* Tenn. Code. Ann. § 10-7-505(b)) why the relief requested

in this Complaint/Petition should not be granted and that Defendant/Respondent be enjoined from refusing to promptly produce documents Plaintiffs/Petitioners have requested;

3. That the Court set a date at least ten (10) business days prior to the date of the hearing which it schedules for Defendant/Respondent to file any brief;

4. That the Court issue an Order in favor of Plaintiffs/Petitioners requiring that all outstanding records requested be produced as quickly as possible, or alternatively, that some, or redacted versions of the records be produced as quickly as possible;

5. That the Court declare that Tennessee Rule of Criminal Procedure 16 is not an exemption to the TPRA in this case when there is neither a pending criminal prosecution nor one reasonably likely to begin related to the records sought in a request under the TPRA;

6. That the Court declare that Defendant/Respondent is estopped and/or otherwise barred from asserting purported exceptions/exemptions to the TPRA other than those asserted in its initial denial(s) of TPRA requests;

7. That the Court deny any and all motions to intervene;

8. That the Plaintiffs/Petitioners reserve all claims/rights/damages under the TPRA and TPPA;

9. That the Court determine that the Defendant/Respondent's refusal to produce these records promptly has been done knowingly, willfully, and deliberately, and award Plaintiffs/Petitioners all attorneys' fees and costs pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-505(g); such amount shall be shown to the Court at the conclusion of this matter;

10. That the costs of this action be taxed against Defendant/Respondent;

11. That the Court grant further relief to ensure Defendant/Respondent continues production of the requested records promptly; and

12. That the Court grant such further relief as it deems just and equitable.

Respectfully submitted,

s/ Robb S. Harvey

Robb S. Harvey (Tenn. BPR No. 011519)  
Quynh-Anh D. Kibler (Tenn. BPR No. 035096)  
HOLLAND & KNIGHT LLP  
511 Union Street, Suite 2700  
Nashville, Tennessee 37219  
Tel. 615.244.6380  
robb.harvey@hklaw.com  
qa.kibler@hklaw.com

*Counsel for Plaintiffs/Petitioners*

### **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that on May 17, 2023, the foregoing Complaint/Petition was electronically filed via the Court's electronic filing system. A courtesy copy of the foregoing was emailed to the following:

Wallace W. Dietz  
Lora Fox  
Cynthia Gross  
Phylinda Ramsey  
Metropolitan Government of Nashville & Davidson County  
Metropolitan Courthouse  
1 Public Square, Suite 108  
Nashville, TN 37210  
wally.dietz@nashville.gov  
lora.fox@nashville.gov  
cynthia.gross@nashville.gov  
phylinda.ramsey@nashville.gov

*Counsel for M Metropolitan Government of Nashville & Davidson County*

Douglas R. Pierce  
KING & BALLOW  
315 Union Street, Suite 1100  
Nashville, TN 37201  
dpierce@kingballow.com

*Counsel for Clata Renee Brewer*

Rocklan W. King III  
F. Laurens Brock  
ADAMS AND REESE LLP  
1600 West End Avenue, Suite 1400  
Nashville, TN 37203  
rocky.king@arlaw.com  
larry.brock@arlaw.com

*Counsel for Covenant Presbyterian Church*

John I. Harris III  
SCHULMAN, LEROY & BENNETT PC  
3310 West End Avenue, Suite 460  
Nashville, TN 37201  
jharris@slblaw.com

*Counsel for James Hammond and  
Tennessee Firearms Association, Inc.*

Eric G. Osborne  
William L. Harbison  
Christopher S. Sabis  
C. Dewey Branstetter  
Ryan T. Holt  
Micah N. Bradley  
Frances W. Perkins  
Hunter C. Branstetter  
William D. Pugh  
SHERRARD ROE VOIGT & HARBISON, PLC  
150 Third Ave South, Suite 1100  
Nashville, TN 37201  
eosborne@srvhlaw.com  
bharbison@srvhlaw.com  
csabis@srvhlaw.com  
dbranstetter@srvhlaw.com  
rholt@srvhlaw.com  
mbradley@srvhlaw.com  
fperkins@srvhlaw.com  
hbranstetter@srvhlaw.com  
wpugh@srvhlaw.com

*Counsel for the Covenant School Parents*

Nicholas R. Barry  
AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION  
611 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 231  
Washington, D.C. 20003  
Nicholas.barry@aflegal.com

*Counsel for Michael Patrick Leahy and  
Star News Digital Media, Inc.*

Peter F. Klett  
Autumn L. Gentry  
DICKINSON WRIGHT PLLC  
424 Church Street, Suite 800  
Nashville, TN 37219  
pklett@kickinsonwright.com  
agentry@dickinsonwright.com

Nader Baydoun  
BAYDOUN & KNIGHT, PLLC  
5141 Virginia Way, Suite 210  
Brentwood, TN 37027  
nbaydoun@baydoun.com

*Counsel for The Covenant School*

s/ Robb S. Harvey  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Counsel for Plaintiffs/Petitioners

# **Exhibit 1**

Jeremy Faison  
Chairman  
House Majority Caucus



House Majority Caucus  
604 Cordell Hull Building  
425 Rep. John Lewis Way North  
Nashville, TN 37243

May 15, 2023

Chief John Drake  
Police Chief  
Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County  
Headquarters, Police Department  
600 Murfreesboro Pike  
Nashville, Tennessee 37210

Chief Drake:

We thank the Metro Nashville Police Department for its incredible efforts in relation to the horrible tragedy at Covenant School on March 27. The agency's heroic response as well as your dedication to investigating the incident since are sincerely appreciated by the people of Tennessee.

As you know, Governor Bill Lee has called upon the General Assembly to consider public safety legislation in response to these events in an extraordinary special session scheduled for Aug. 21.

In order for this special session to be successful, it is paramount we understand the behavior and motives of the Covenant School perpetrator.

We respectfully request the release of the perpetrator's writings as well as relevant medical records and toxicology reports.

We are united in our shared common goal and duty to protect the safety and well-being of Tennesseans. The release of these records is critical to the General Assembly's ability to construct effective solutions that can prevent future acts of violence. The citizens of this state and their elected representatives must have adequate time to review them.

We appreciate your efforts to fulfill our request.

Speaker Cameron Sexton  
Speaker of the House

Representative Jeremy Faison  
House Republican Caucus Chair

**Jeremy Faison**  
Chairman  
House Majority Caucus



**House Majority Caucus**  
604 Cordell Hull Building  
425 Rep. John Lewis Way North  
Nashville, TN 37243

Representative Rebecca Alexander  
Representative Jody Barrett  
Representative Clark Boyd  
Representative Rush Bricken  
Representative Gino Bulso  
Representative Jeff Burkhart  
Representative Ed Butler  
Representative Kip Capley  
Representative Dale Carr  
Representative Michele Carringer  
Representative Scott Cepicky  
Representative Mark Cochran  
Representative John Crawford  
Representative Tandy Darby  
Representative Elaine Davis  
Representative Rick Eldridge  
Representative Andrew Farmer  
Representative Monty Fritts  
Representative John Gillespie  
Representative Rusty Grills  
Representative Kirk Haston  
Representative Michael Hale  
Representative David Hawk  
Representative Esther Helton-Haynes  
Representative Gary Hicks  
Representative Tim Hicks  
Representative-Appointee Timothy Hill  
Representative John Holsclaw  
Representative Dan Howell  
Representative Bud Hulsey  
Representative Chris Hurt  
Representative Curtis Johnson

Representative Kelly Keisling  
Representative Sabi Kumar  
Representative Justin Lafferty  
Representative Mary Littleton  
Representative Pat Marsh  
Representative Brock Martin  
Representative Greg Martin  
Representative Jake McCalmon  
Representative Debra Moody  
Representative Jerome Moon  
Representative Dennis Powers  
Representative John Ragan  
Representative Kevin Raper  
Representative Jay Reedy  
Representative Bryan Richey  
Representative Tim Rudd  
Representative Iris Rudder  
Representative Lowell Russell  
Representative Paul Sherrell  
Representative William Slater  
Representative Mike Sparks  
Representative Robert Stevens  
Representative Bryan Terry  
Representative Chris Todd  
Representative Ron Travis  
Representative Kevin Vaughan  
Representative Greg Vital  
Representative Todd Warner  
Representative Mark White  
Representative Ryan Williams  
Representative Dave Wright  
Representative Jason Zachary

# **Exhibit 2**



**Public Records Act Requests by *The Tennessean*  
to the Metro Police Department Which Have Been Denied and which are the subject of the  
Complaint/Petition**

<b>Date of Request</b>	<b>Description</b>
3/27/2023	Police reports with Audrey E. Hale named
3/28/2023	All calls for service ( <i>i.e.</i> , communications requesting police assistance) to Covenant School and to Hale's home. Limited to past five years
3/28/2023	Incident report for initial police response on 03/27/2023 to 3005 Brightwood Avenue
3/28/2023	Incident report for second police response on 03/27/2023 to 3005 Brightwood Avenue
3/28/2023	All documents in Audrey Hale's possession immediately prior to Hale's death, including the car and home, including journals and hand-drawn maps

Pending request to Metro Police Department – no response received:

4/4/2023      Copies of any search warrants filed on Hale's home

Requests for Autopsy records have been submitted to the Davidson County Medical Examiner, have not been responded to, and are not part of this Petition. For the time being, *The Tennessean* will limit its requests to the autopsy and toxicology reports on Hale.

**\*\**The Tennessean*** has in the past requested body cam and dash cam footage, as well as surveillance footage. For purposes of its Petition/Complaint, those requests should be held in abeyance as they are not being pursued at this time.

# **Exhibit 3**



**METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT**  
*of Nashville and Davidson County*

John Cooper, Mayor

John C. Drake  
Chief of Police

**PUBLIC RECORD REQUEST RESPONSE FORM**

Governmental Entity Name and Address: MNPD Central Records Division 811 Anderson Lane, Suite 100 Madison, TN 37115

Date: 4/4/2023 RE: AUDREY HALE'S POSSESSIONS, MAP OF SCHOOL, JOURNAL/WRITINGS

Requestor's Name and Contact Information: RACHEL WEGNER

In response to your records request received on 3/28/2023 our office is taking the action(s) indicated below:  
[Date Request Received]

- ☐ The public record(s) responsive to your request will be made available for inspection:
- ☐ Location: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Date & Time: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Copies of public record(s) responsive to your request are:
- ☐ Attached;
- ☐ Available for pickup at the following location: \_\_\_\_\_; or
- ☐ Being delivered via: ☐ USPS First-Class Mail ☐ Electronically Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☒ Your request is denied on the following grounds:
- ☐ Your request was not sufficiently detailed to enable identification of the specific requested record(s). You need to provide additional information to identify the requested record(s).
- ☐ No such record(s) exists or this office does not maintain record(s) responsive to your request.
- ☐ No proof of Tennessee citizenship was presented with your request. Your request will be reconsidered upon presentation of an adequate form of identification.
- ☐ You are not a Tennessee citizen.
- ☐ You have not paid the estimated copying/production fees.
- ☒ The following state, federal, or other applicable law prohibits disclosure of the requested records:  
Open Case - Rule 16 of the Tennessee Rules of Criminal Procedure and Tennessean v. Metro. Gov't of Nashville, 485 S.W.3d 857 (Tenn. 2016)
- ☐ It is not practicable for the records you requested to be made promptly available for inspection and/or copying because:
- ☐ It has not yet been determined that records responsive to your request exist; or
- ☐ The office is still in the process of retrieving, reviewing, and/or redacting the requested records.

The time reasonably necessary to produce the record(s) or information and/or to make a determination of a proper response to your request is: \_\_\_\_\_.

If you have any additional questions regarding your record request, please contact Public Records Request Coordinator.

Sincerely,

**Central Records Division 615-862-7631**  
**145221**



# **Exhibit 4**

**Senator Todd  
Gardenhire**



425 Rep. John Lewis Way  
Suite 716  
Nashville, TN 37243  
(615) 741-6682

P. O. Box 4506  
Chattanooga, TN 37405  
(423) 888-6403

sen.todd.gardenhire@capitol.tn.gov



## Senate Chamber State of Tennessee

**NASHVILLE**

**10<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District**  
Bledsoe, Marion, Sequatchie  
and part of Hamilton Counties



**COMMITTEES:**

Judiciary, Chairman and  
Education

**Subcommittees:**

*Fiscal Review, Vice-Chairman*

April 12, 2023

Metro Nashville Police Department  
Chief John Drake  
600 Murfreesboro Pike  
Nashville, TN 37210

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Chief Drake:

This is a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

I request that a copy of the following document: the manifesto and journals left by Audrey Hale prior to the shooting at The Covenant School be provided to me. In order to help to determine my status to assess fees, you should know that I am a Tennessee State Senator who will be instrumental in writing new laws regarding school safety. This is not for commercial use, but will be used as research.

I request a waiver of all fees for this request. Disclosure of the requested information to me is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government.  
Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Todd Gardenhire  
Chairman, Judiciary Committee  
State of Tennessee General Assembly

# **Exhibit 5**

From: "Hagar, Mike (MNPd)" <[mike.hagar@nashville.gov](mailto:mike.hagar@nashville.gov)>  
Date: April 24, 2023 at 4:14:50 PM EDT  
To: Todd Gardenhire <[sen.todd.gardenhire@capitol.tn.gov](mailto:sen.todd.gardenhire@capitol.tn.gov)>  
Subject: Request for Open Case Files

Senator Gardenhire,

The MNPd is in receipt of your letter of April 12, 2023 requesting "the manifesto and journals left by Audrey Hale prior to the shooting at The Covenant School" be provided to you.

These items remain relevant to an open criminal investigation. Under Rule 16 of the Tennessee Rules of Criminal Procedure, which has been held by Tennessee courts to be an exception to the state Public Records Act, are therefore not a public record available for release at this time. The MNPd defers to the legal judgment of the District Attorney General and other authorities to ensure compliance with the public release of such files. Until these authorities determine that disclosure of the records would not violate Rule 16 or other applicable law, the MNPd is unable to release these records.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly.

Thanks

Mike Hagar  
Assistant Chief  
Metropolitan Nashville Police Department  
PO Box 196399  
Nashville, TN 37219-6399  
(615) 862-7790

# **Exhibit 6**



# Holland & Knight

511 Union Street, Suite 2700 | Nashville, TN 37219 | T 615.244.6380 | F 615.244.6804  
Holland & Knight LLP | [www.hklaw.com](http://www.hklaw.com)

Robb S. Harvey  
+1 615-850-8859  
[Robb.Harvey@hklaw.com](mailto:Robb.Harvey@hklaw.com)

April 24, 2023

## VIA EMAIL

Chief John Drake  
Bureau of the Chief of Police  
Nashville, Tennessee  
[John.drake@nashville.gov](mailto:John.drake@nashville.gov); [chiefofpolice@nashville.gov](mailto:chiefofpolice@nashville.gov)

cc: Don Aaron, MNPDP Public Affairs, [don.aaron@nashville.gov](mailto:don.aaron@nashville.gov)  
Wally Dietz, Metro Legal Director, [wally.dietz@nashville.gov](mailto:wally.dietz@nashville.gov)

Re: Denial of Public Records Requests by *The Tennessean* and its reporting staff  
regarding the Covenant School murders

Dear Chief Drake:

We write to ask that you reconsider and reverse the City's denial of multiple requests under the Tennessee Public Records Act for records in the custody of the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department. These requests have been made by Rachel Wegner and *The Tennessean*.

This appeal to the Chief of Police regarding public records requests by the media is uncommon. We believe, however, that you are in a unique position to correct Metro's current course and adhere to the spirit of transparency embodied in Tennessee law – especially given your stated commitment to transparency being a hallmark of your leadership. The production of records would be consistent with the release of body cam footage. The Covenant School murders are a tragedy that we hope will never be repeated. Our readers expect the Metro Nashville Police Department (“MNPDP”) to be transparent, but so far most of our requests have been denied and our readers' expectations have been defeated.

Although these are not the only records as to which we have been denied access, the murderer's journals (including the so-called “manifesto”) and suicide note are among the records as to which we seek immediate production. As you know, access might be delayed if there is a pending criminal investigation. *See* Tenn. R. Crim. P. 16. That rule is often waived at the discretion of law enforcement – such as when the police are seeking the media's assistance in identifying a suspected criminal. In this instance, the shooter is dead and the MNPDP's April 3, 2023 Media Release not only stated that the shooter acted alone but also provided some

Chief John Drake

April 24, 2023

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information regarding the shooter's journals. There is and can be no pending criminal investigation. Rule 16 does not provide any reasonable "cover" to reject a request.

Some in the media have reported that the reason MNPd is refusing to comply with Tennessee Public Records Act requests is because MNPd is acting at the behest of the FBI.<sup>1</sup> As I am sure you are aware, the FBI cannot direct your actions, nor may it ask MNPd to violate the Public Records Act. If MNPd contends that a criminal investigation is pending, please immediately explain what the investigation is and who the criminal targets of the investigation are.

Tennessee Rule of Criminal Procedure Rule 16(a)(2) is a work product exemption – a limited rule requiring a pending criminal investigation. The rule applies to materials "made by" law enforcement and constituting "work product." The Tennessee Supreme Court in the case involving the rape of a Vanderbilt student gave the rule a broad reading, but that decision does not protect MNPd's public records denials here.

We are confident that you will take the public's request for reconsideration seriously and further the Public Records Act's goal of openness in government.

Sincerely,

/s/ Michael Anastasi (electronic signature)

Michael Anastasi

Tennessean Editor/Region Editor USA Today Network

/s/ Robb S. Harvey

Robb S. Harvey

Holland and Knight LLP

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<sup>1</sup> [https://nypost.com/2023/04/20/audrey-hale-manifesto-blueprint-on-destruction-say-pols-who-claim-fbi-stalling-release/?utm\\_source=sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=news\\_alert&utm\\_content=20230420?&utm\\_source=sailthru&lctg=607d920f373dd11b6ec3dee2&utm\\_term=NYP%20-%20News%20Alerts](https://nypost.com/2023/04/20/audrey-hale-manifesto-blueprint-on-destruction-say-pols-who-claim-fbi-stalling-release/?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=news_alert&utm_content=20230420?&utm_source=sailthru&lctg=607d920f373dd11b6ec3dee2&utm_term=NYP%20-%20News%20Alerts)