

**PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE RULES GOVERNING THE  
PUBLIC INSPECTION AND SEALING OF COURT RECORDS  
FOR NEW MEXICO STATE COURTS**

The Joint Committee on Rules for the Public Inspection and Sealing of Court Records for New Mexico State Courts has recommended proposed rule amendments for the Supreme Court's consideration. All of the proposed rule amendments may be viewed on the Supreme Court's web site.

If you would like to comment on the proposed amendments set forth below before they are submitted to the Court for final consideration, you may do so by either submitting a comment electronically through the Supreme Court's web site at <http://nmsupremecourt.nmcourts.gov/> or sending your written comments to:

Kathleen J. Gibson, Clerk  
New Mexico Supreme Court  
P.O. Box 848  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504-0848

Your comments must be received on or before December 27, 2010, to be considered by the Court. Please note that any submitted comments may be posted on the Supreme Court's web site for public viewing.

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**[NEW MATERIAL]**

**2-112. Public inspection and sealing of court records.**

A. **Presumption of public access; scope of rule.** Court records are subject to public access unless sealed by order of the court or otherwise protected from disclosure under the provisions of this rule. This rule does not prescribe the manner in which the court shall provide public access to court records, electronically or otherwise. No person or entity shall knowingly file a court record that discloses material obtained from another court record that is sealed, conditionally under seal, or subject to a pending motion to seal under the provisions of this rule.

B. **Definitions.** For purposes of this rule the following definitions apply:

(1) "court record" means all or any portion of a document, paper, exhibit, transcript, or other material filed or lodged with the court, and the register of actions and docket entries used by the court to document the activity in a case;

(2) "lodged" means a court record that is temporarily deposited with the court but not filed or made available for public access;

(3) "protected personal identifier information" means social security numbers, taxpayer-identification numbers, financial account numbers, all but the year of a person's date of birth, and all but the last four digits of a driver's license number;

(4) "public" means any person or entity, except the parties to the proceeding, counsel of record, and court personnel;

(5) "public access" means the inspection and copying of court records by the public; and

(6) “sealed” means a court record for which public access is limited by order of the court or as required by Paragraph C of this rule.

**C. Protection of personal identifier information.**

(1) Unless otherwise ordered by the court, court records shall not contain protected personal identifier information.

(2) If the court requires protected personal identifier information in a court record, such information shall not be disclosed to the public except by order of the court. Such information may otherwise be disclosed to local, state, tribal and federal agencies authorized by law to collect or use the information disclosed.

(3) The court clerk is not required to review documents submitted by the parties for compliance with this paragraph and shall not refuse for filing any document that does not comply with this paragraph. The court clerk is not required to screen court records released to the public to prevent disclosure of protected personal identifier information.

**D. Motion to seal court records required.** Except as provided in Paragraph C of this rule, no portion of a court record shall be sealed except by court order. Any party or member of the public may file a motion for an order sealing the court record. The motion is subject to the provisions of Rule 2-307 NMRA, and a copy of the motion shall be served on all parties who have appeared in the case in which the court record has been filed or is to be filed. Any party or member of the public may file a response to the motion to seal within fifteen (15) days after the motion is filed. The movant shall lodge the court record with the court pursuant to Paragraph E when the motion is made, unless the court record was previously filed with the court or good cause exists for not lodging the court record pursuant to Paragraph E. Pending the court’s ruling on the motion, the lodged court record will be conditionally sealed. If necessary to prevent disclosure, any motion, response or reply, and any supporting documents, shall be filed in a redacted version that will be subject to public access and lodged in a complete, unredacted version that will remain conditionally sealed pending the court’s ruling on the motion. If the court denies the motion, the clerk shall return any lodged court records and shall not file them in the court file.

**E. Procedure for lodging court records.** A court record that is the subject of a motion filed under Paragraph D of this rule shall be secured in an envelope or other appropriate container by the movant and lodged with the court unless the court record was previously filed with the court or unless good cause exists for not lodging the court record. The movant shall label the envelope or container lodged with the court “CONDITIONALLY UNDER SEAL” and affix to the envelope or container a cover sheet that contains the information required under Rule 2-203.1 NMRA and which states that the enclosed court record is subject to a motion to seal. On receipt of a lodged court record, the clerk shall endorse the cover sheet with the date of its receipt and shall retain but not file the court record unless the court orders it filed. If the court grants an order sealing a court record, the clerk shall substitute the label provided by the movant on the envelope or container with a label prominently stating “SEALED BY ORDER OF THE COURT ON (DATE)” and shall attach a file-stamped copy of the court's order.

**F. Requirements for order to seal court records.**

(1) The court shall not permit a court record to be filed under seal based solely on the agreement or stipulation of the parties. The court may order that a court record be filed under seal only if the court by written order finds and states facts that establish the following:

(a) the existence of an overriding interest that overcomes the right of public access to the court record;

(b) the overriding interest supports sealing the court record;  
(c) a substantial probability exists that the overriding interest will be prejudiced if the court record is not sealed;

(d) the proposed sealing is narrowly tailored; and

(e) no less restrictive means exist to achieve the overriding interest.

(2) The order shall require the sealing of only those documents, pages, or portions of a court record that contain the material that needs to be sealed. All other portions of each document or page shall be filed without limitation on public access. If necessary, the order may direct the movant to prepare a redacted version of the sealed court record that will be made available for public access.

(3) The order shall state whether the order itself, the register of actions, or individual docket entries are to be sealed.

(4) The order shall specify who is authorized to have access to the sealed court record.

(5) The order shall specify a date or event upon which it expires or shall explicitly state that the order remains in effect until further order of the court.

(6) The order shall specify any person or entity entitled to notice of any future motion to unseal the court record or modify the sealing order.

G. **Sealed court records as part of record on appeal.** Court records sealed under the provisions of this rule that are filed as part of an appeal to the district court shall remain sealed in the district court. The district court judges and staff may have access to the sealed court records unless otherwise ordered by the district court. Requests to unseal such records or modify a sealing order entered in the magistrate court shall be filed in the district court pursuant to Rule 1-079 NMRA if the case is pending on appeal.

H. **Motion to unseal court records.**

(1) A sealed court record shall not be unsealed except by court order or pursuant to the terms of the sealing order itself. A party or member of the public may move to unseal a sealed court record. A copy of the motion to unseal is subject to the provisions of Rule 2-307 NMRA and shall be served on all persons and entities who were identified in the sealing order pursuant to Subparagraph (6) of Paragraph F for receipt of notice. If necessary to prevent disclosure, the motion, any response or reply, and supporting documents shall be filed in a redacted version and lodged in a complete and unredacted version.

(2) In determining whether to unseal a court record, the court shall consider the matters addressed in Subparagraph (1) of Paragraph F. If the court grants the motion to unseal a court record, the order shall state whether the court record is unsealed entirely or in part. If the court's order unseals only part of the court record or unseals the court record only as to certain persons or entities, the order shall specify the particular court records that are unsealed, the particular persons or entities who may have access to the court record, or both. If, in addition to the court records in the envelope or container, the court has previously ordered the sealing order, the register of actions, or individual docket entries to be sealed, the unsealing order shall state whether those additional court records are unsealed.

I. **Failure to comply with sealing order.** Any person or entity who knowingly discloses any material obtained from a court record sealed or lodged pursuant to this rule may be held in contempt of court or subject to other sanctions as the court deems appropriate.

[Adopted by Supreme Court Order \_\_\_\_\_, effective \_\_\_\_\_]

[See committee commentary to Rule 6-114]

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