

23RD JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT FOR THE PARISH OF ASCENSION
STATE OF LOUISIANA

NO. 146,326

DIVISION "B"

RURAL ROOTS LOUISIANA and LOUISIANA BUCKET BRIGADE

VERSUS

ASCENSION PARISH

FILED: _____
DEPUTY CLERK

JUDGMENT AND INCORPORATED REASONS

This matter came before the Court on the 13th day of February, 2026, pursuant to the Petition for Mandamus filed by Plaintiffs, Rural Roots Louisiana and Louisiana Bucket Brigade. Additionally, this matter came before the Court on the same date pursuant to Defendant, Ascension Parish’s, Exception of Nonjoinder of Indispensable Party, Exception of Lack of Procedural Capacity as to Louisiana Bucket Brigade, and Exception of No Right of Action all of which were filed on December 30, 2025

PRESENT IN COURT: Pamela Spees, Attorney for Plaintiff, Rural Roots Louisiana;
William Quigley, Attorney for Plaintiff, Louisiana Bucket Brigade; and
Jean Paul Robert, Attorney for Defendant, Ascension Parish

After consideration of the pleadings, memorandum, and exhibits thereto presented to the Court in the above captioned matter, and after contradictory hearing being held and the subsequent *in-camera* inspection by this Court:

IT IS ORDERED, ADJUDGED, AND DECREED that the Petition for Mandamus filed by Plaintiff, Rural Roots Louisiana, on December 10, 2025, is hereby **GRANTED** and it is hereby ordered that Defendant, Ascension Parish shall produce all applicable records requested, specifically all documents responsive to the public records request at issue (which are the same documents produced to the Court for *in-camera* inspection), within five (5) days from notice of this judgment. Further, Plaintiff shall be awarded court costs incurred and attorney’s fees in the amount of \$1000.00.

PROCEDURAL POSTURE

During the hearing in open court on the aforementioned date, the Court granted the Exception of Lack of Procedural Capacity and Louisiana Bucket Brigade was dismissed from the matter. Further, the Court denied the Exception of Nonjoinder of Indispensable Party, and the Exception of No Right of Action.

Following these rulings in open court, this Court took up the Petition for Mandamus filed by Defendants on December 10, 2025. Accordingly, this matter was taken under advisement. In doing so, the Court ordered Defendant, Ascension Parish to produce to the Court for an *in camera* inspection, any and all Non-Disclosure Agreements (“NDAs”) signed by Parish officials with Louisiana Economic Development, or any other part of the government, and/or with any corporation or business entity. This submission was to be made within fifteen (15) days of the hearing held on February 13, 2026.

The purpose for Ascension Parish producing the documents sought by the public records requests for *in camera* inspection was so the Court could review said documents and subsequently make a determination as to whether the asserted privileges apply. Originally, this Court had not received said documentation from Ascension Parish in the time period provided for at the hearing and as such issued Judgment in the above captioned matter on March 26, 2026. After the rendering of said Judgment, this Court was advised by Counsel for Ascension Parish that said documents had in fact been delivered to the receptionist at the Ascension Parish Judicial Building, however, said documents were never delivered to this division of the Court. The parties in this matter voluntarily consented in open Court on May 11, 2026 to the March 26, 2026 Judgment being vacated and the parties have further requested that the Court proceed forward with the *in-camera inspection* as previously ordered and issue Judgment accordingly.

APPLICABLE LAW

LSA – R.S. 44:31 A.(3) states “The burden of proving that a public record is not subject to inspection, copying, or reproduction shall rest with the custodian.” Thus, in order for the asserted privileges to production to be deemed applicable, Ascension Parish must prove that they do indeed apply. During argument on the Petition for Mandamus and within its filed opposition, Ascension Parish asserted the “Deliberative Process Privilege” and the “Trade Secrets Privilege”. The “Deliberative Process Privilege” is claimed to protect government officials who are deliberating

on potential new policies or legislation for the areas they govern. This privilege is designed to protect the deliberative nature and ability of these meetings. The Trade Secrets Privilege is designed to protect the Trade Secrets of any business entity that could be included in documents sought by Public Records Requests. These are both privileges that are claimed as exceptions to the Public Records Doctrine.

Further, Ascension Parish during the hearing of this matter asserted that the provisions of La. R.S. 44:22.2 have been satisfied, thus providing protection from production for the at-hand documents. This statute is very specific as to the procedure that must be followed by the public entity for protections provided by this statute to apply. It is clear that at the time of the public records request at issue being made, Ascension Parish had not properly performed said procedures and these protections were not applicable as a basis to prevent production of the requested documentation.

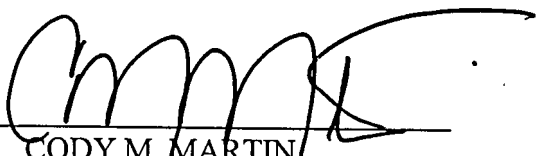
The commonly referred to “Trade Secrets Privilege” is set forth in La. R.S. 44:4(3). In order for this privilege from production to apply, the statute states that the documents must in their nature be confidential. This Court finds that the Confidentiality and/or Non-Disclosure Agreements presented to this Court for *in camera* inspection are not in and of themselves documents which are confidential in nature. The documents are specifically intended to govern the relationship and procedures between the parties to the agreements concerning the subsequent production of any documents which are confidential in nature (and may include trade secrets, financials, and other business documents which would by their nature have an expectation of privacy/confidentiality). As such, this Court does not find that La. R.S. 44:4(3) provides protection for production these specific documents requested by Petitioner.

Lastly, Ascension Parish asserts that the “Deliberative Process Privilege” protects the applicable documents from production under the Louisiana Public Records Act. According to its own briefing, the deliberative process privilege protects “confidential intra-agency advisory opinions” from disclosure of which would be injurious to the consultative functions of government. Ascension Parish does not assert that any of these documents at issue are actually advisory opinions between two governmental entities. Ascension Parish merely submits that to the extent that the Confidentiality Agreements at issue are advisory, they should be protected. As stated above, the burden of proving protection from production of documents is on the custodian

who is bound by law to produce said documents. Ascension Parish has not met its burden in doing so. Furthermore, upon this Court's own review of the documents at issue, this Court does not find that these documents are the types of documents for which the deliberative process privilege anticipates providing protection.

For these reasons, the Mandamus action filed by Petitioners in this matter has been granted.

JUDGMENT RENDERED AND SIGNED in Convent, Louisiana on this 15th day of May, 2026.



CODY M. MARTIN
JUDGE – DIVISION “B”
23RD JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT

PLEASE NOTIFY:
All Counsel of Record