

24 of Article 41 of this Code may ask for an administrative review of this decision in accordance with Section 251 through 254 of Article 41 of this Code, however, this remedy need not be exhausted prior to filing suit in the circuit court pursuant to this article.

(b) (1) On complaint of any person denied the right to inspect any record covered by this article, the circuit court in the jurisdiction in which the complainant resides, or has his principal place of business, or in which the records are situated, has jurisdiction to enjoin the State, any county, municipality, or political subdivision, any agency, official or employee thereof, from withholding records and to order the production of any records improperly withheld from the complainant. In such a case, the court may examine the contents of the records in camera to determine whether the records or any part thereof may be withheld under any of the exemptions set forth in Section 3, and the burden is on the defendant to sustain its action. In carrying this burden the defendant may submit to the court for review a memorandum justifying the withholding of the records.

(2) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the defendant shall serve an answer or otherwise plead to any complaint made under this subsection within 30 days after service upon the defendant of the pleading in which the complaint is made, unless the court otherwise directs for good cause shown.

(3) Except as to cases the court considers of greater importance, proceedings before the court, as authorized by this section, and appeals therefrom shall take precedence on the docket over all other cases and shall be heard at the earliest practicable date and expedited in every way.

(4) In addition to any other relief which may be granted to a complainant, in any suit brought under the provisions of this section in which the court determines that the defendant has knowingly and wilfully failed to disclose or fully disclose records and information to any person who, under this article, is entitled to receive it, and the defendant knew or should have known that the person was entitled to receive it, any defendant governmental entity or entities shall be liable to the complainant in an amount equal to the sum of the actual damages sustained by the individual as a result of the refusal or failure and such punitive damages as the court deems appropriate.

(5) In the event of noncompliance with an order of the court, the court may punish the responsible employee for contempt.