

Group wants access to files

Petition alleges documents are kept from view
By **Sandy Hodson** | *Staff Writer Augusta Chronicle*
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Contending that Augusta public records have been unreasonably withheld and possibly falsified, the Association for Fair Government filed legal action Tuesday.

The petition for mandamus - which asks the court to force a public entity to do its job - was filed in Richmond County Superior Court.

The association's petition alleges that the city's procurement department has ignored at least one request to view public documents concerning a city contract with private businesses; denied requests to inspect documents about noncompetitive contracts; and demanded what the association says are unreasonable charges to view public documents.

The association's petition further alleges it has found evidence that records have been removed from the Augusta City Commission's documents concerning procurement business nearly 50 times.

The petition also contends that one business that submitted a bid package either provided false certification or the procurement department incorrectly stamp-dated the bid package.

The business was awarded a \$124,145 contract.

The Association for Fair Government asks that the city be compelled to perform its official duties. It also requests a temporary restraining order to prevent any alteration of documents.

The association also seeks a judge's ruling that the public is allowed to view public documents maintained by the procurement department upon request and without administrative charges.

Tuesday's petition is the second filed against the city over the access to public records in the procurement department.

No hearing date has been set.

The city will have 30 days to respond to the petition. Any lawsuit represents only one side of a dispute.