

§ 1-72.1. Procedure to assert right of access.

(a) Any person asserting a right of access to a civil judicial proceeding or to a judicial record in that proceeding may file a motion in the proceeding for the limited purpose of determining the person's right of access. The motion shall not constitute a request to intervene under the provisions of Rule 24 of the Rules of Civil Procedure and shall instead be governed by the procedure set forth in this statute. The movant shall not be considered a party to the action solely by virtue of filing a motion under this section or participating in proceedings on the motion. An order of the court granting a motion for access made pursuant to this section shall not make the movant a party to the action for any purpose.

(b) The movant shall serve a copy of its motion on all parties to the proceeding in any manner provided in Rule 5 of the Rules of Civil Procedure. Upon receipt of a motion filed pursuant to this section, the court shall establish the date and location of the hearing on the motion that shall be set at a time before conducting any further proceedings relative to the matter for which access is sought under the motion. The court shall cause notice of the hearing date and location to be posted at the courthouse where the hearing is scheduled. The movant shall serve a copy of the notice of the date, time, and location of the hearing on all parties to the proceeding in any manner provided in Rule 5 of the Rules of Civil Procedure.

(c) The court shall rule on the motion after consideration of such facts, legal authority, and argument as the movant and any other party to the action desire to present. The court shall issue a written ruling on the motion that shall contain a statement of reasons for the ruling sufficiently specific to permit appellate review. The order may also specify any conditions or limitations on the movant's right of access that the court determines to be warranted under the facts and applicable law.

(d) A party seeking to seal a document or testimony to be used in a court proceeding may submit the document or testimony to the court to be reviewed in camera. This subsection also applies to (i) any document or testimony that is the subject of a motion made under this section and that is submitted for review for the purposes of the court's consideration of the motion to seal, and (ii) to any document or testimony that is the subject of a motion made under this section and that was submitted under seal or offered in closed session prior to the filing of a motion under this section. Submission of the document or proffer of testimony to the court pursuant to this section shall not in itself result in the document or testimony thereby becoming a judicial record subject to constitutional, common law, or statutory rights of access unless the document or testimony is thereafter introduced into evidence after a motion to seal or to restrict access is denied.

(e) A ruling on a motion made pursuant to this section may be the subject of an immediate interlocutory appeal by the movant or any party to the proceeding. Notice of appeal must be given in writing, filed with the court, and served on all parties no later than 10 days after entry of the court's ruling. If notice of appeal is timely given and given before further proceedings are held in the court that might be affected by appellate review of the matter, the court, on its own motion or on the motion of the movant or any party, shall consider whether to stay any proceedings that could be affected by appellate review of the court's ruling on the motion. If notice of appeal is timely given but is given only after further proceedings in the trial court that could be affected by appellate review of the ruling on a motion made pursuant to this section, or if a request for stay of proceedings is made and is denied, then the sole relief that shall be available on any appeal in the event the appellate court determines that the ruling of the trial court was erroneous shall be reversal of the trial court's ruling on the motion and remand for rehearing or retrial. On appeal the court may determine that a ruling of the trial court sealing a document or restricting access to proceedings or refusing to unseal documents

or open proceedings was erroneously entered, but it may not retroactively order the unsealing of documents or the opening of testimony that was sealed or closed by the trial court's order.

(f) This section is intended to establish a civil procedure for hearing and determining claims of access to documents and to testimony in civil judicial proceedings and shall not be deemed or construed to limit, expand, change, or otherwise preempt any provisions of substantive law that define or declare the rights and restrictions with respect to claims of access. Without in any way limiting the generality of the foregoing provision, this section shall not apply to juvenile proceedings or court records of juvenile proceedings conducted pursuant to Chapters 7A, 7B, 90, or any other Chapter of the General Statutes dealing with juvenile proceedings.

(g) Nothing in this section diminishes the rights of a movant or any party to seek appropriate relief at any time from the Supreme Court or Court of Appeals through the use of the prerogative writs of mandamus or supersedeas. (2001-516, s. 1.)