

CJ Griffin Quoted in New Jersey Monitor on New Jersey Supreme Court Decision Allowing Public Access to Correctional Officer's Settlement Agreement

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CJ Griffin, Director of the Justice Gary S. Stein Public Interest Center at Pashman Stein Walder Hayden, was quoted in the *New Jersey Monitor* article "N.J.'s top court delivers transparency win in records fight over jail guard retirement." The article discusses a recent New Jersey Supreme Court decision in the case of *Libertarians for Transparent Government v. Cumberland County*, in which Griffin represented the plaintiff. Plaintiff sought, pursuant to the New Jersey Open Records Act (OPRA), the settlement agreement of a correctional officer who had been allowed to retire in good standing despite his admission that he had "inappropriate relationships" with two inmates and brought contraband into the county jail. In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court reversed the Appellate Division and ruled that settlement agreements which include a person's name, title and "date of separation and reason therefor" are government records subject to public access under OPRA, with appropriate redactions.

"This is a great win for transparency," said attorney CJ Griffin, who argued the case for plaintiff Libertarians for Transparent Government. "It's a very basic concept – we're entitled to see records, and we don't have to rely on what the government tells us."

The article notes that in response to Plaintiff's OPRA request, the county refused to release the settlement agreement responding only that "Officer Ellis was charged with a disciplinary infraction and was terminated."

Such lies and misrepresentations from public officials are why this ruling is so important, Griffin said.

“OPRA is a law that exists so that we get to check under the hood and poke around for ourselves, rather than just rely on what a public agency tells us,” she said. “In this case, we knew what the public agency told us was false. The Supreme Court ordered this common-sense ruling so that we get to see the truth. We don’t have to rely on their spin or misrepresentation.”

To view the full article, [click here](#).

The Morning Monitor newsletter of the *New Jersey Monitor*, described the ruling:

Huzzah to CJ Griffin, the powerhouse lawyer and transparency advocate who notched up another win yesterday when the state Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Cumberland County cannot refuse to release a settlement agreement between the county and a jail guard accused of sexual misconduct. Dana wrote about the ruling, which should — but, alas, probably won’t! — be a warning to public entities who want to hide plainly public records.