

SUPREME COURT OF OHIO

State ex rel. Ames v. Big Walnut Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn.

2026-Ohio-532 · No. 2024-1616 · Decided February 19, 2026

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Ohio denied Brian M. Ames’s request for a writ of mandamus requiring the Big Walnut Local School District Board of Education to produce the original video recording of an April 15, 2024 meeting. The court held that Ames had abandoned his original production request, was not entitled to an additional good-faith response, and could not recover statutory damages, attorney’s fees, or court costs. Separate opinions concurred in judgment only and disagreed principally over whether the board’s initial response supported statutory damages.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Ohio
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Per curiam; Fischer, J.; Brunner, J.; Hawkins, J.; Deters, J.; DeWine, J.; Shanahan, J.; Kennedy, C.J.
JURISDICTION	Supreme Court of Ohio
DECIDED	February 19, 2026
DOCKET	2024-1616
DISPOSITION	writ_denied
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Original mandamus action in the Supreme Court of Ohio arising from a public-records request. The court had granted an alternative writ, received evidence and briefing, and adjudicated the request for a writ, statutory damages, attorney's fees, and court costs.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A requester seeking mandamus under the Public Records Act must establish by clear and convincing evidence a clear legal right to the requested record and a corresponding clear legal duty to provide it.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published opinion; precedential under Ohio law, subject to formal revision before publication in the Ohio Official Reports advance sheets.
PARTIES	Brian M. Ames v. Big Walnut Local School District Board of Education

TOPICS

civil procedure

remedies

administrative law

statutory interpretation

attorney fees

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

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mandamus

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Ames was entitled to a writ of mandamus compelling production of the requested video when he conceded that the video no longer existed.
2. Whether Ames could obtain a writ compelling the school board to provide an additional good-faith response that the requested record did not exist when that relief was not requested in his complaint.
3. Whether the school board's failure to identify nonexistence of the record as the initial reason for denial entitled Ames to statutory damages.
4. Whether Ames was entitled to attorney's fees or court costs.

HOLDINGS

1. Ames abandoned his original request for a writ ordering production of the video by conceding that the record did not exist and failing to argue entitlement to production in his merit brief; the court therefore did not address that request.
2. Ames was not entitled to a writ ordering the school board to provide an additional good-faith response because he requested only production of the record in his complaint and did not amend the complaint to seek the different relief.
3. Ames was not entitled to statutory damages because the requested video no longer existed and he therefore did not show that the school board failed to provide a copy of it within a reasonable period of time.
4. Ames was not entitled to attorney's fees because he represented himself and therefore did not incur attorney's fees.
5. Ames was not entitled to court costs because the court did not order production of the requested record.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“To obtain the writ, “the requester must prove by clear and convincing evidence a clear legal right to the record and a corresponding clear legal duty on the part of the respondent to provide it.”” (§ 13)

“For the foregoing reasons, we deny Ames’s request for a writ of mandamus and his requests for statutory damages, attorney’s fees, and court costs. Writ denied.” (§ 24)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Ames sought the original, unaltered video recording of the school board's April 15, 2024 meeting. A technical error caused the original livestream to lack audio, and the school district's information-technology director removed the original from public view and then accidentally deleted it. A separate audio-only recording

remained available, and the school board supplied Ames with a link to that recording after denying his request as ambiguous.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Ames requested the original unaltered video of an April 15, 2024 school-board meeting. The school board denied the request as ambiguous, provided a link to a separate audio recording, and invited Ames to revise or clarify the request. Ames filed a mandamus action rather than responding to the board. After the board submitted evidence that the requested video had been accidentally deleted, the Supreme Court of Ohio granted an alternative writ and ultimately denied the writ and all requested monetary relief.

DISPOSITION

writ_denied

CASES CITED

- State ex rel. Columbia Res., Ltd. v. Lorain Cty. Bd. of Elections, 2006-Ohio-5019, ¶ 20
- State ex rel. Wells v. Lakota Local Schools Bd. of Edn., 2024-Ohio-3316, ¶ 11
- State ex rel. Griffin v. Sehlmeier, 2021-Ohio-1419, ¶ 10
- State ex rel. Ohio Gen. Assembly v. Brunner, 2007-Ohio-3780, ¶ 26, fn. 4
- State ex rel. Tjaden v. Geauga Cty. Bd. of Elections, 2024-Ohio-3396, ¶ 25, fn. 6
- State ex rel. Duncan v. Chambers-Smith, 2025-Ohio-978, ¶ 17
- State ex rel. Massie v. Gahanna-Jefferson Pub. Schools Bd. of Edn., 1996-Ohio-47, ¶ 19
- State ex rel. Summers v. Fox, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 74
- State ex rel. Huth v. Animal Welfare League of Trumbull Cty., Inc., 2022-Ohio-3583, ¶ 18
- State ex rel. Brinkman v. Toledo City School Dist. Bd. of Edn., 2024-Ohio-5063, ¶ 6
- State ex rel. Alford v. Diehl, 2025-Ohio-2836, ¶ 12
- State ex rel. Culgan v. Jefferson Cty. Prosecutor, 2024-Ohio-4715, ¶ 13
- Rhodes v. New Philadelphia, 2011-Ohio-3279, ¶¶ 14-16, 24
- State ex rel. Fogle v. Steiner, 1995-Ohio-278, ¶ 12
- State ex rel. Ayers v. Sackett, 2025-Ohio-2115, ¶¶ 27-29
- State ex rel. Warren Newspapers, Inc. v. Hutson, 1994-Ohio-5, ¶ 17
- State ex rel. Natl. Broadcasting Co., Inc. v. Cleveland, 38 Ohio St.3d 79, 81 (1988)
- State ex rel. Doe v. Smith, 2009-Ohio-4149, ¶ 45
- State ex rel. Ware v. Smith, 2025-Ohio-1856, ¶ 117
- State ex rel. Armatas v. Plain Twp. Bd. of Trustees, State ex rel. Armatas v. Plain Twp. Bd. of Trustees, 2021-Ohio-1176, ¶¶ 30-31