

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
NORTH CAROLINA

Shoals Technologies Group, LLC v. Voltage, LLC, and Ningbo
Voltage Smart Production Co.

Shoals Technologies Group · No. 1:25CV26 · Decided April 13, 2026

SUMMARY

An order and memorandum opinion addressing numerous motions to seal materials filed in Shoals Technologies Group, LLC v. Voltage, LLC, and Ningbo Voltage Smart Production Co. The court applies the common-law and First Amendment rights of public access, distinguishes judicial from non-judicial records, and grants or denies sealing requests as to specific docket entries and documents.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina
WRITING FOR THE COURT	J. Webb Gibson
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina
DECIDED	April 13, 2026
DOCKET	1:25CV26
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The district court addressed multiple pending motions to seal materials filed in connection with pretrial motions, motions in limine, a motion for preliminary injunction, and related proceedings.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	For judicial records subject to the common-law right of access, sealing is permitted only when countervailing interests heavily outweigh the public interest in access. For records subject to the First Amendment right of access, the party seeking sealing must show a compelling governmental interest and that the restriction is narrowly tailored, with no less restrictive alternative. The moving party must provide specific factual support and explain how disclosure would cause harm.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court order; precedential status unknown

TOPICS

- civil procedure
- commercial litigation
- intellectual property
- trade secrets

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

commercial litigation

intellectual property

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Which materials filed in connection with the parties' motions qualify as judicial records subject to a public right of access?
2. What standard governs requests to seal or redact materials subject to the common-law right of access?
3. What standard governs requests to seal or redact materials subject to the First Amendment right of access?
4. Whether the parties established sufficient, specific, and narrowly tailored grounds to seal or redact each category of requested material.
5. What remedial filing and replacement instructions should issue for documents that were improperly sealed or for which a more specific sealing showing may be made?

HOLDINGS

1. Materials filed with the objective of obtaining judicial action or relief, including materials submitted with motions asking the court to rule on admissibility or preliminary-injunction issues, are judicial records subject to a public right of access. Materials submitted solely to summarize expected evidence and arguments for a bench trial, without seeking judicial action or relief, are not judicial records.
2. A party seeking to seal a judicial record subject to the common-law right of access must demonstrate that countervailing interests heavily outweigh the public interest in access and must provide specific reasons supporting the requested sealing.
3. A party seeking to seal judicial records subject to the First Amendment right of access must show a compelling interest, demonstrate that sealing is narrowly tailored, and establish that no less restrictive alternative will adequately protect the interest.
4. A protective-order designation or a generalized assertion that materials contain confidential information does not relieve the party seeking sealing of the obligation to establish, with specific support, why sealing is necessary and to narrowly tailor the request.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Under common law, there is a presumption of access accorded to judicial records. This presumption of access, however, can be rebutted if countervailing interests heavily outweigh the public interests in access.”

“Claims of confidentiality cannot be made indiscriminately and without evidentiary support, even in patent cases where such claims are highly likely to be valid.”

“Going forward, there will be no further second chances to provide the Court with the information necessary to make a reasoned determination prior to unsealing.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Shoals Technologies Group and Voltage were litigating patent-related claims and defenses involving photovoltaic trunk bus cable technology, while also participating in a related International Trade Commission investigation. The parties sought to seal materials containing alleged confidential business information, expert testimony and reports, financial and design information, privilege logs, and materials from the ITC proceeding. Some parties disputed confidentiality designations, consented to unsealing, or relied primarily on protective orders without providing specific evidence of harm.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The parties filed numerous motions seeking to seal or redact briefs, exhibits, expert reports, transcripts, privilege logs, and other materials. The court determined which materials were judicial records, applied the common-law or First Amendment right of access as appropriate, and ruled on each motion individually, granting, denying, or partially granting the motions. The court also ordered the parties to file public versions or renewed, narrowly tailored sealing requests for specified documents within fourteen days.

DISPOSITION

other

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

No remand. The court ordered the Clerk to unseal specified documents, permitted specified redacted versions to remain or be filed, directed the parties to replace certain sealed filings with publicly available versions, and allowed renewed, narrowly tailored sealing motions within fourteen days for specified documents. If the required documents or renewed motions were not filed within the permitted time, specified exhibits would be unsealed.

CASES CITED

- *Nixon v. Warner Communications, Inc.*, 435 U.S. 589, 597 (1978)
- *Doe v. Public Citizen*, 749 F.3d 246, 266, 269, 272 (4th Cir. 2014)
- *Va. Dept. of State Police v. Wash. Post*, 386 F.3d 567, 576, 579 (4th Cir. 2004)
- *United States ex rel. Oberg v. Nelnet, Inc.*, 105 F.4th 161, 170-71, 173 n.10 (4th Cir. 2024)
- *Rushford v. New Yorker Mag., Inc.*, 846 F.2d 249, 253 (4th Cir. 1988)
- *In re United States for an Order Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 2703(D)*, 707 F.3d 283, 290-91 (4th Cir. 2013)
- *Stone v. Univ. of Maryland Med. Sys. Corp.*, 855 F.2d 178, 181 (4th Cir. 1988)
- *In re Knight Publ'g Co.*, 743 F.2d 231, 235 (4th Cir. 1984)
- *Kinetic Concepts, Inc. v. Convatec Inc.*, No. 1:08CV918, 2010 WL 1418312, at *9-10 (M.D.N.C. Apr. 2, 2010)
- *Trs. of Purdue Univ. v. Wolfspeed, Inc.*, No. 1:21CV840, 2023 WL 2776193, at *2 (M.D.N.C. Feb. 28, 2023)
- *Hunter v. Town of Mocksville*, 961 F. Supp. 2d 803, 806 (M.D.N.C. 2013)
- *Syngenta Crop Prot. LLC v. Willowood, LLC*, No. 1:15CV274, 2017 WL 11685097, at *1 (M.D.N.C. Sept. 11, 2017)

- Smithkline Beecham Corp. v. Abbott Labs., No. 1:15CV360, 2017 WL 11552659, at *3 (M.D.N.C. Mar. 7, 2017)
- Azima v. Del Rosso, No. 1:20CV954, 2025 WL 2903820, at *1 (M.D.N.C. July 14, 2025)
- Lord Corp. v. S & B Tech. Prods., Inc., No. 5:09CV205, 2012 WL 895947, at *1 (E.D.N.C. Mar. 15, 2012)
- Covington v. Semones, Civ. Act. No. 7:06CV614, 2007 WL 1170644, at *2 (W.D. Va. Apr. 17, 2007)
- Natera, Inc. v. NeoGenomics Lab'ys, Inc., No. 1:23CV629, 2024 WL 1464744, at *2 (M.D.N.C. Apr. 4, 2024)
- RLI Ins. Co. v. Nexus Servs., Inc., No. 5:18CV66, 2018 WL 10602398, at *1 (W.D. Va. Oct. 30, 2018)
- Rahman v. Wells Fargo Bank, N.A., No. 1:24CV333, 2025 WL 713850, at *5 (M.D.N.C. Mar. 5, 2025)
- United States ex rel. Thomas v. Duke Univ., No. 1:17CV276, 2018 WL 4211375, at *13 (M.D.N.C. Sept. 4, 2018)
- Colony Ins. Co., No. 1:10CV581, 2012 WL 1047089, at *2 (M.D.N.C. Mar. 28, 2012)
- Adjabeng v. GlaxoSmithKline, LLC, No. 1:12CV568, 2014 WL 459851, at *3 (M.D.N.C. Feb. 5, 2014)

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