

About R.T.I

What is Right to Information?

Every citizen has a right to know how the Government is functioning. Right to Information empowers every citizen to seek any information from the Government, inspect any Government documents and seek certified photocopies thereof. Some laws on Right to Information also empower citizens to official inspect any Government work or to take sample of material used in any work.

But why should the Government provide information?

In 1975, Hon'ble Supreme Court said in the case of Raj Narain vs Union of India:

“In a government of responsibility like ours where the agents of the public must be responsible for their conduct there can be but a few secrets. The people of this country have a right to know every public act, everything that is done in a public way by their public functionaries. They are entitled to know the particulars of every public transaction in all its bearings.”

Article 19(1) of the Constitution provides for Fundamental Right of speech & expression. Supreme Court has said that a person cannot express himself unless he “knows”. Hence, Right to Information is a part of the Fundamental Right of speech & expression.

Besides, we live in democracy. The Governments are by the people, of the people and for the people. The people are the masters. All the taxes collected by the Governments belong to the people. Hence the people have a right to know how they are being governed and how their money is being used.

If it is a fundamental right, then why do we need right to information laws?

Right to Information laws provide the machinery for the use of this right. Suppose you go to a government office and demand an officer to show all his files because this is your fundamental right, he will not do that. So, the right to information laws provide for forms in which you can apply, where you can apply, in how many days you should get information, what if you do not get information etc.

Who can ask for information?

Any citizen can ask for information under these laws.

From which governments can we ask information?

Presently, nine state governments have passed right to information laws. These are Jammu & Kashmir, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Goa and Assam. Hence, any citizen of India can ask information from any of these State Governments related to their respective affairs. The Central Government has recently tabled a Central Right to

Information Bill in Parliament. Once that is passed, then any citizen would be able to seek information from any state or central government.

Do these laws apply to private bodies also?

The situation varies from state to state. The laws apply to any body controlled or substantially financed by the Government. In some states, the laws also apply to cooperative bodies and societies. However, there has been a demand that these laws should be made applicable to such private bodies who provide public services, like telecom companies, electricity companies etc.

What kind of information can one ask for?

A person can ask for any information related to the government functioning like copies of contracts of various government works, copies of bills and vouchers, status of any application filed with the government, status of various grievances or corruption cases pending, attendance registers of gardeners or sweepers in your area, log book of vehicles used by various government functionaries, list of works carried out by your MLA and MP, obtain sample of material of any government work, documents related to various policies and budgets of the governments etc