



October 26, 2018

Office of the General Counsel  
Attn: FOIA Service Center  
Executive Office for Immigration Review  
5107 Leesburg Pike, Suite 1903  
Falls Church, VA 22041  
[EOIR.FOIARequests@usdoj.gov](mailto:EOIR.FOIARequests@usdoj.gov)

**Re: Freedom of Information Act Request**

Dear Freedom of Information Officers:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and your agency's implementing regulations, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

In April 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that the United States would adopt a "zero tolerance" policy of separating parents and children arrested while attempting to enter the country illegally.

As of mid-June 2018, the federal government had separated and detained more than 2,000 children, housing many of them in chain-link cages in temporary facilities set up along the border.<sup>1</sup> This harsh and unpopular policy cost American taxpayers millions of dollars, including those spent on the sudden creation of "tent cities," transport services, and "shelter care" for unaccompanied children.<sup>2</sup> In June, news reports based on Health and Human Services statistics indicated that it cost \$775 per child to hold separated migrant children overnight in tents<sup>3</sup>—more than twice the cost of holding them with their parents or in more permanent buildings.

Despite Trump's executive order in June that "ended" the separation policy after public outcry, as of late August 2018, nearly 500 migrant children were still separated from their parents and

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<sup>1</sup> Camila Domonoske & Richard Gonzales, *What We Know: Family Separation And 'Zero Tolerance' At the Border*, NPR (June 19, 2018, 2:17 PM), <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/19/621065383/what-we-know-family-separation-and-zero-tolerance-at-the-border>.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel Layne & Aimee Picchi, *The Businesses Making Millions from Trump's Child Separation Policy*, CBS NEWS (June 21, 2018, 10:47 AM), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trumps-family-separation-policy-already-cost-millions/>.

<sup>3</sup> Julia Ainsley, *Trump Admin's 'Tent Cities' Cost More Than Keeping Migrant Kids with Parents*, NBC NEWS (June 20, 2018, 4:30 AM), <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/immigration-border-crisis/trump-admin-s-tent-cities-cost-more-keeping-migrant-kids-n884871>.



remained in U.S. government-funded facilities; two-thirds of these children have parents who were deported earlier this summer.<sup>4</sup>

American Oversight is seeking records to understand the costs to U.S. taxpayers associated with the Trump administration's policy of separating and detaining children of immigrants arrested at the border.

### **Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) produce the following within twenty business days:

1. All records reflecting communications (including emails, email attachments, text messages, voicemail transcripts, messages on messaging platforms—such as Slack, GChat or Google Hangouts, Lync, Skype, WhatsApp, Facebook messaging, Twitter Direct Messages, or Signal—calendar invitations, calendar entries, meeting notices, meeting agendas, informational material, draft legislation, talking points, any handwritten or electronic notes taken during any oral communications, summaries of any oral communications, or other materials) regarding the cost of the family separation policy, including:
  - a. the availability or unavailability of budgeted, obligated, or appropriated funds;
  - b. any evaluation, assessment, or analysis of currently available appropriations that could be used to fund implementation of the family separation policy; and
  - c. constraints on planning for funding of the family separation policy.
2. All records reflecting communications (including emails, email attachments, text messages, voicemail transcripts, messages on messaging platforms—such as Slack, GChat or Google Hangouts, Lync, Skype, WhatsApp, Facebook messaging, Twitter Direct Messages, or Signal—calendar invitations, calendar entries, meeting notices, meeting agendas, informational material, draft legislation, talking points, any handwritten or electronic notes taken during any oral communications, summaries of any oral communications, or other materials) concerning the appropriations, budgeting requests, and costs involved with the implementation of the family separation policy between the below-identified custodians and Congress, including congressional committees or staff. Responsive documents should include emails on which such custodians and/or Congress were only copied (cc) or blind copied (bcc).

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<sup>4</sup> Maria Sacchetti, *Still Separated: Nearly 500 Migrant Children Taken from Their Parents Remain in U.S. Custody*, WASH. POST, Aug. 31, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/immigration/still-separated-nearly-500-separated-migrant-children-remain-in-us-custody/2018/08/30/6dbd8278-aa09-11e8-8a0c-70b618c98d3c\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/immigration/still-separated-nearly-500-separated-migrant-children-remain-in-us-custody/2018/08/30/6dbd8278-aa09-11e8-8a0c-70b618c98d3c_story.html).

Please provide all responsive records from January 20, 2017, to the date the search is conducted.

EOIR may limit its search to the following custodians:

- Director James McHenry
- Deputy Director Katherine Reilly
- Assistant Director Lisa Ward, Office of Administration
- Assistant Director Lauren Reid, Office of Policy

In addition to the records requested above, American Oversight also requests records describing the processing of this request, including records sufficient to identify search terms used and locations and custodians searched and any tracking sheets used to track the processing of this request. If your agency uses FOIA questionnaires or certifications completed by individual custodians or components to determine whether they possess responsive materials or to describe how they conducted searches, we also request any such records prepared in connection with the processing of this request.

American Oversight seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. In conducting your search, please understand the terms “record,” “document,” and “information” in their broadest sense, to include any written, typed, recorded, graphic, printed, or audio material of any kind. We seek records of any kind, including electronic records, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs, as well as letters, emails, facsimiles, telephone messages, voice mail messages and transcripts, notes, or minutes of any meetings, telephone conversations or discussions. Our request includes any attachments to these records. **No category of material should be omitted from search, collection, and production.**

Please search all records regarding agency business. **You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts.** Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.<sup>5</sup> **It is not adequate to rely on policies and procedures that require officials to move such information to official systems within a certain period of time; American Oversight has a right to records contained in those files even if material has not yet been moved to official systems or if officials have, through negligence or willfulness, failed to meet their obligations.**<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, 827 F.3d 145, 149–50 (D.C. Cir. 2016); cf. *Judicial Watch, Inc. v. Kerry*, 844 F.3d 952, 955–56 (D.C. Cir. 2016).

<sup>6</sup> See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016) (“The Government argues that because the agency had a policy requiring [the official] to forward all of his emails from his [personal] account to his business email, the [personal] account only contains duplicate agency records at best. Therefore, the Government

In addition, please note that in conducting a “reasonable search” as required by law, you must employ the most up-to-date technologies and tools available, in addition to searches by individual custodians likely to have responsive information. Recent technology may have rendered your agency’s prior FOIA practices unreasonable. **In light of the government-wide requirements to manage information electronically by the end of 2016, it is no longer reasonable to rely exclusively on custodian-driven searches.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, agencies that have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies, now maintain emails in a form that is reasonably likely to be more complete than individual custodians’ files.** For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but your agency’s archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insists that your agency use the most up-to-date technologies to search for responsive information and take steps to ensure that the most complete repositories of information are searched. American Oversight is available to work with you to craft appropriate search terms. **However, custodian searches are still required; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.**

Under the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, agencies must adopt a presumption of disclosure, withholding information “only if . . . disclosure would harm an interest protected by an exemption” or “disclosure is prohibited by law.”<sup>8</sup> If it is your position that any portion of the requested records is exempt from disclosure, American Oversight requests that you provide an index of those documents as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973), *cert. denied*, 415 U.S. 977 (1974). As you are aware, a *Vaughn* index must describe each document claimed as exempt with sufficient specificity “to permit a reasoned judgment as to whether the material is actually exempt under FOIA.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the *Vaughn* index “must describe *each* document or portion thereof withheld, and for *each* withholding it must discuss the consequences of disclosing the sought-after information.”<sup>10</sup> Further, “the withholding agency must supply ‘a relatively detailed

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claims that any hypothetical deletion of the [personal account] emails would still leave a copy of those records intact in [the official’s] work email. However, policies are rarely followed to perfection by anyone. At this stage of the case, the Court cannot assume that each and every work related email in the [personal] account was duplicated in [the official’s] work email account.” (citations omitted)).

<sup>7</sup> Presidential Memorandum—Managing Government Records, 76 Fed. Reg. 75,423 (Nov. 28, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/28/presidential-memorandum-managing-government-records>; Office of Mgmt. & Budget, Exec. Office of the President, Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments & Independent Agencies, “Managing Government Records Directive,” M-12-18 (Aug. 24, 2012), <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114–185).

<sup>9</sup> *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

<sup>10</sup> *King v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223–24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphases in original).

justification, specifically identifying the reasons why a particular exemption is relevant and correlating those claims with the particular part of a withheld document to which they apply.”<sup>11</sup>

In the event some portions of the requested records are properly exempt from disclosure, please disclose any reasonably segregable non-exempt portions of the requested records. If it is your position that a document contains non-exempt segments, but that those non-exempt segments are so dispersed throughout the document as to make segregation impossible, please state what portion of the document is non-exempt, and how the material is dispersed throughout the document.<sup>12</sup> Claims of nonsegregability must be made with the same degree of detail as required for claims of exemptions in a *Vaughn* index. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically that it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.

**You should institute a preservation hold on information responsive to this request.** American Oversight intends to pursue all legal avenues to enforce its right of access under FOIA, including litigation if necessary. Accordingly, you are on notice that litigation is reasonably foreseeable.

To ensure that this request is properly construed, that searches are conducted in an adequate but efficient manner, and that extraneous costs are not incurred, American Oversight welcomes an opportunity to discuss its request with you before it undertakes a search or incurs search or duplication costs. By working together at the outset, we can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

Where possible, please provide responsive material in electronic format by email or in PDF or TIF format on a USB drive. Please send any responsive material being sent by mail to American Oversight, 1030 15th Street NW, Suite B255, Washington, DC 20005. If it will accelerate release of responsive records to American Oversight, please also provide responsive material on a rolling basis.

### **Fee Waiver Request**

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and your agency’s implementing regulations, American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. The subject of this request concerns the operations of the federal government, and the disclosures will likely contribute to public understanding of those operations. Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.

American Oversight requests a waiver of fees because disclosure of the requested information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of activities of the government. The disclosure of the information sought under this request will document and

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<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 224 (citing *Mead Data Central, Inc. v. U.S. Dep’t of the Air Force*, 566 F.2d 242, 251 (D.C. Cir. 1977)).

<sup>12</sup> *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

reveal the operations of the federal government, including the use of taxpayers' money to enforce the Trump administration's family separation policy. The public has a profound interest in understanding how the government allocates funds to border enforcement priorities and from where such funds have been diverted. Responsive records will also document the importance placed on enforcement of the family separation policy and the justification for it.

This request is primarily and fundamentally not for commercial purposes, but rather the primary interest is in public disclosure of responsive records. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the information requested is not in American Oversight's financial interest. American Oversight's mission is to promote transparency in government, to educate the public about government activities, and to ensure the accountability of government officials. American Oversight uses the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, or other media. American Oversight also makes materials it gathers available on its public website and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>13</sup> American Oversight has demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content. For example, after receiving records regarding an ethics waiver received by a senior DOJ attorney,<sup>14</sup> American Oversight promptly posted the records to its website and published an analysis of what the records reflected about DOJ's process for ethics waivers.<sup>15</sup> As another example, American Oversight has a project called "Audit the Wall," where the organization is gathering and analyzing information and commenting on public releases of information related to the administration's proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

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<sup>13</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 11,900 page likes on Facebook and 45,600 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Oct. 26, 2018); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Oct. 26, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> *DOJ Civil Division Response Noel Francisco Compliance*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>.

<sup>15</sup> *Francisco & the Travel Ban: What We Learned from the DOJ Documents*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/francisco-the-travel-ban-what-we-learned-from-the-doj-documents>.

<sup>16</sup> *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>.

## Conclusion

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with your agency on this request. If you do not understand any part of this request, have any questions, or foresee any problems in fully releasing the requested records, please contact Hart Wood at [foia@americanoversight.org](mailto:foia@americanoversight.org) or (202) 897-3918. Also, if American Oversight's request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Austin R. Evers", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Austin R. Evers  
Executive Director  
American Oversight