VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

U.S. Marshals Service
CG-3, 15th Floor
Washington, DC 20530
usms.foia@usdoj.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Freedom of Information Officer:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations of the Department of Justice (DOJ), 28 C.F.R. Part 16, American Oversight and National Security Action makes the following request for records from the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS).

The Trump administration politicized the issue of the so-called migrant caravan—Central Americans migrating north through Mexico in order to seek asylum in the U.S.—in the runup to the midterm elections on November 6, 2018, and press reporting suggests the administration stepped up hardline immigration rhetoric in order to rally the president’s base.¹

The Trump administration updated guidance for the active duty military deployed to border regions authorizing use of force to protect border patrol officers,² and on November 25, 2018, U.S. border agents responded with tear gas to a group of migrants—many women and children—engaged

in peaceful protest.\(^3\) The active military deployment, initially set to end on December 15, 2018, has been extended through the end of January.\(^4\)

Given the administration’s track record of haphazard immigration policy\(^5\) combined with the lack of a clear threat from the migrant caravan as well as the president’s encouragement of nationalist sentiment\(^6\) and recent political violence,\(^7\) it is in the public interest to understand how the administration plans to manage and deescalate the situation at our border.

**Requested Records**

American Oversight and National Security Action request that USMS produce the following within twenty business days:

1) Records sufficient to identify all procedures, standards, guidance, policies, or rules produced by or provided to USMS regarding engagements or interactions with private militia or minutemen groups in border areas.

2) Records sufficient to show any orders, procedures, policies, or guidance related to how USMS interacts with the Department of Homeland Security and its components—including U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement—in border region operations.

3) All records reflecting communications (including emails, email attachments, and notes or records created based on phone calls) between USMS and (1) private militias or minutemen in border areas and/or (2) the National Border Patrol Union (including anyone with an email address ending in bpunion.org). If USMS creates any databases or spreadsheets based on inputs from reporting by private militias or minutemen, those would be responsive to this request.

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USMS may limit its search to the following individuals and offices:

i. Political appointees* in the Office of the Director;
ii. The immediate Office of Public Affairs for USMS;
iii. The US Marshal for the District of Arizona, David Gonzales;
iv. The US Marshal for the Southern District of California, Steven Stafford;
v. The US Marshal for the District of New Mexico, Sonya Chavez;
vi. The US Marshal for the Southern District of Texas, Gary Blankinship; and
vii. The US Marshal for the Western District of Texas, Susan Pamerleau.

*“Political appointee” should be understood as any person who is a Presidential Appointee with Senate Confirmation (PAS), a Presidential Appointee (PA), a non-career SES, any Schedule C employees, or any persons hired under Temporary Non-Career SES Appointments, Limited Term SES Appointments, or Temporary Transitional Schedule C Appointments.

Please provide responsive records from October 12, 2018, through the date on which the search is conducted.

In addition to the records requested above, we also request 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 USMS 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 and National Security Action seek 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.* **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 and National Security Action have a right to records contained in those files**

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even if material has not yet been moved to official systems or if officials have, through negligence or willfulness, failed to meet their obligations.

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 USMS’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. 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 USMS’s archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight and National Security Action insist that USMS 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. We are 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.” If it is your position that any portion of the requested records are exempt from disclosure, American Oversight and National Security Action request 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.” Moreover, the Vaughn index “must

\[9\] 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 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)).


\[12\] Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).
describe each document or portion thereof withheld, and for each withholding it must discuss the consequences of disclosing the sought-after information.” Further, “the withholding agency must supply ‘a relatively detailed 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.’”

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. 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. We intend to pursue all legal avenues to enforce our right of access under FOIA, including litigation if necessary. Accordingly, you are on notice that litigation is reasonably foreseeable.

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 and National Security Action, 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 28 C.F.R. § 16.10(k), American Oversight and National Security Action request 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 a better understanding of government operations by the general public in a significant way. Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.

American Oversight and National Security Action request 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 the operations or activities of the government.” President Trump has

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14 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)).
15 Mead Data Central, 566 F.2d at 261.
16 28 C.F.R. § 16.10(k)(2).
17 Id.
repeatedly emphasized the alleged dangers of a caravan of immigrants moving north through Mexico, going so far as to respond to that perceived threat by sending potentially tens of thousands of soldiers to the U.S.-Mexico border. Additionally, vigilantes are reportedly traveling to the border in response to President Trump’s warnings. The requested records will help the general public understand the factors influencing decisions surrounding the government’s response to the caravan, and whether and to what extent USMS has been in communication with nongovernmental militia groups. Furthermore, the requested records will help the general public understand how USMS operates in the border region to assist in the government’s response to immigration issues. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses agencies provide to FOIA requests publicly available. The subject of this request is a matter of public interest, and American Oversight would make these records publicly available.

This request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes. 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 website and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. 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, 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. 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

20 28 C.F.R. § 16.10(k)(iii)(A)–(B).
information related to the administration’s proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-
Mexico border.\(^\text{24}\)

National Security Action’s interest in the disclosure of the requested records is purely non-
commercial. National Security Action is a 501(c)(4) non-profit public interest organization
dedicated to using the power of information to advocate for strong, principled American
leadership on the global stage. National Security Action will use the information gathered in
furtherance of this mission. National Security Action is comprised of national security experts, and
publishes informational materials and commentary to educate the public on contemporary
national security issues.\(^\text{25}\) Like American Oversight, National Security Action plans to use the
information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through various media including
reports and press releases.

Accordingly, American Oversight and National Security Action qualify for a fee waiver.

**Conclusion**

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight and
National Security Action look forward to working with USMS 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 or 202.873.1743.
Also, if our request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon
making such a determination.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

Austin R. Evers  
Executive Director  
American Oversight

Jeff Prescott  
Executive Director  
National Security Action

\(^{24}\) *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, [https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall](https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall).