March 25, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Tink Cooper, Acting Chief
FOIA/PA Branch
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
BICN Bldg., Room 3234
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530
CRT.FOIArequests@usdoj.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear FOIA Officer:

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.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that the Civil Rights Division (CRT) produce the following within twenty business days:

> Records reflecting all cases, complaints, charges, allegations, compliance reviews, investigations, or similar proceedings into alleged civil rights violations (for ease of reference, referred to hereinafter as "Complaints"), including the following categories of data,[1] as applicable:[2]
>
> - Case number;
> - Region;
> - Office or component against which the Complaint is made;

[1] American Oversight requests responsive data in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet format, to the extent your agency maintains such data in a database or other format that can be readily exported into such format.

[2] American Oversight recognizes that your agency may use different terminology than the categories listed. American Oversight requests that you provide the requested information most closely related to each category, to the extent available. American Oversight welcomes the opportunity to discuss with you the types of data tracked and maintained by your agency that may be responsive to this request.

- To the extent your agency receives Complaints against external organizations or institutions:
    - Name of external organization or institution named in Complaint;
    - State of external organization or institution named in Complaint;
    - Zip code of external organization or institution named in Complaint;
- Date Complaint was received;
- Date an investigation into or review of the Complaint was opened or commenced;
- Race, national origin, religion (if applicable), disability type (if any), sex, and gender identity of the complainant(s);
- Stage of the case;
- If applicable, the date the case was closed;
- Whether the Complaint was treated as an individual or class/system Complaint;
- If the Complaint was closed, the basis for resolution or closure;
- The manner in which the Complaint was closed;
- If the Complaint was closed through a resolution agreement, indicate the type of resolution; and
- Whether the case is still in monitoring;

American Oversight does not object to redaction from such records of any names or identifying information of Complainant(s) or agency personnel.

American Oversight requests that the data be provided for two separate time periods:

1. January 20, 2008, through January 19, 2017; and
2. January 20, 2017, through the date the search is conducted.

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.[3] **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.**[4]

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.**[5] **Furthermore, agencies that have adopted the National Archives and**

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[3] *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).

[4] *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)).

[5] 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,

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."[6] 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."[7] 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."[8] 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.'"[9]

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.[10] 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.

"Managing Government Records Directive," M-12-18 (Aug. 24, 2012), https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf.

[6] FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114–185).

[7] *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

[8] *King v. U.S. Dep't of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223–24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphases in original).

[9] *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)).

[10] *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

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 you undertake your search or incur 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, 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 a better understanding of relevant government procedures by the general public in a significant way. 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 government activities and operations. The subject matter of the requested documents specifically relates to the operations or activities of the government, because CRT is responsible for investigating and enforcing federal civil rights laws across the country. Major shifts in federal civil rights policies have occurred since the start of the current administration.[11] The public has little

[11] *See, e.g.*, Rob Arthur, *Exclusive: Trump's Justice Department Is Investigating 60% Fewer Civil Rights Cases than Obama's*, VICE NEWS, Mar. 6, 2019, https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/bjq37m/exclusive-trumps-justice-department-is-investigating-60-fewer-civil-rights-cases-than-obamas; Aleksandr Sverdlik, *Border Patrol and ICE Routinely Violate Immigrants' Religious Rights*, ACLU (Mar. 20, 2019, 11:00 AM), https://www.aclu.org/blog/immigrants-rights/ice-and-border-patrol-abuses/border-patrol-and-ice-routinely-violate; *Trump's Title X Rule Will Restrict Abortion Access and Obstruct Women's Healthcare*, L.A. TIMES (Mar. 25, 2019, 3:10 AM), https://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-trump-title-x-gag-rule-20190323-story.html; Laura Meckler & Devlin Barrett, *Trump Administration Considers Rollback of Anti-Discrimination Rules*, WASH. POST, Jan. 3, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/trump-administration-considers-rollback-of-anti-discrimination-rules/2019/01/02/f96347ea-046d-11e9-b5df-5d3874f1ac36_story.html?utm_term=.3229a5db3ccf; Tracy Jan, *Ben Carson's HUD Dials Back Investigations Into Housing Discrimination*, WASH. POST, Dec. 24, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/ben-carsons-hud-dials-back-investigations-into-housing-discrimination/2018/12/21/65510cea-f743-11e8-863c-9e2f864d47e7_story.html?utm_term=.15565335667b; Steve Greene, *'Patriot Act': Hasan Minhaj Looks at Civil Rights Rollbacks During the Current Administration*, INDIEWIRE (Mar. 3, 2019,

information to assess what tangible impact these policies are having on civil rights enforcement and investigations at the federal level. The requested data has the potential to reveal how CRT is allocating resources in support of its civil rights enforcement responsibilities.

This request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.[12] 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.[13] 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,[14] 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.[15] 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.[16]

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

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 Katherine Anthony at foia@americanoversight.org or (202) 897-3918. Also, if the request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

6:21 PM), https://www.indiewire.com/2019/03/patriot-act-netflix-civil-rights-hasan-minhaj-1202048372/.

[12] 34 C.F.R. § 5.33(c)(1)–(2).

[13] American Oversight currently has approximately 12,200 page likes on Facebook and 54,300 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight (last visited Mar. 25, 2019); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER (last visited Mar. 25, 2019).

[14] *DOJ Records Relating to Solicitor General Noel Francisco's Recusal*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-franciscocompliance.

[15] *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-thedoj-documents.

[16] *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall.

Sincerely,

Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight