



March 2, 2020

**VIA EMAIL**

Ryan Witt, FOIA Officer  
Bureau of Land Management  
Attn: FOIA Office (WO-640)  
1849 C St. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240  
[BLM\\_WO\\_FOIA@blm.gov](mailto:BLM_WO_FOIA@blm.gov)

**Re: Freedom of Information Act Request**

Dear Mr. Witt:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), 43 C.F.R. Part 2, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

On November 12, 2019, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) employees in Washington, D.C. were informed that they “had 30 days to decide whether to move to Grand Junction, Colorado, or other regional offices—and then 90 more to pack up and go,” pursuant to DOI’s plan to relocate BLM headquarters.<sup>1</sup> Media reporting indicates that few BLM employees accepted the reassignment.<sup>2</sup>

American Oversight submits this request to shed light on the staffing impacts on BLM resulting from the plan to move the agency’s headquarters to Colorado and otherwise reassign Washington, D.C.-based employees to other regional offices (hereinafter the “BLM Relocation Plan”).

**Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) produce the following records within twenty business days:

1. Any final cost-benefit analysis or other financial justification for the BLM Relocation Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Heather Hansman, *The Problem with the BLM Moving to the West*, OUTSIDE, Nov. 21, 2019, <https://www.outsideonline.com/2405827/blm-move-grand-junction-colorado-problem>.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Katz, *Few BLM Employees Agree to Relocate as Interior Attempts to Ease Pain of Those It Will Fire*, GOV’T EXEC., Dec. 13, 2019, <https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2019/12/few-blm-employees-agree-relocate-interior-attempts-ease-pain-those-it-will-fire/161895/>.



2. Any final analysis of the impact of the BLM Relocation Plan on employee retention, including but not limited to any analysis of the potential disparate impacts on protected classes of employees.
3. Records sufficient to show the number of Washington, DC-based BLM employees who have been asked to relocate due to the BLM Relocation Plan, and to which BLM division those employees are currently assigned.
4. Records sufficient to show the number of BLM employees who have declined to relocate from Washington, DC, and to which BLM division those employees are currently assigned.
5. Any final plan or guidance established to fill positions in the Grand Junction, CO headquarters left vacant due to employees declining to relocate from Washington, DC.
6. Any other final guidance or decision memoranda regarding the BLM Relocation Plan.

American Oversight believes your agency is best positioned to determine where responsive records reside. We believe that a search for responsive records should include, at a minimum, the Office of the Director and BLM's Colorado State office.

### **Fee Waiver Request**

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and 43 CFR § 2.45(a), 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 operations or activities of the government."<sup>3</sup> The requested records are directly related to the operations of the federal government because they would reveal the effects of the BLM Relocation Plan on the ability of the parts of the federal government tasked with protecting public lands to carry out those responsibilities. The public has a significant interest in understanding whether and to what extent BLM's relocation will adversely affect the protection of public lands in which all Americans have a stake. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses agencies provide to FOIA requests publicly available, and the public's understanding of the

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<sup>3</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

government's activities would be enhanced through American Oversight's analysis and publication of these records.

This request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.<sup>4</sup> 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>5</sup>

American Oversight has also demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content through numerous substantive analyses posted to its website.<sup>6</sup> Examples reflecting this commitment to the public disclosure of documents and the creation of editorial content include the posting of records related to an ethics waiver received by a senior Department of Justice attorney and an analysis of what those records demonstrated regarding the Department's process for issuing such waivers;<sup>7</sup> posting records received as part of American Oversight's "Audit the Wall" project to gather and analyze information related to the administration's proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border, and analyses of what those records reveal;<sup>8</sup> posting records regarding potential self-dealing at the Department of Housing & Urban Development and related analysis;<sup>9</sup> posting records and analysis relating to the federal

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<sup>4</sup> See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

<sup>5</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 15,500 page likes on Facebook and 101,800 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Feb. 26, 2020); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Feb. 26, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> News, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

<sup>7</sup> *DOJ Records Relating to Solicitor General Noel Francisco's Recusal*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>; *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>8</sup> See generally *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>; see, e.g., *Border Wall Investigation Report: No Plans, No Funding, No Timeline, No Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/border-wall-investigation-report-no-plans-no-funding-no-timeline-no-wall>.

<sup>9</sup> *Documents Reveal Ben Carson Jr.'s Attempts to Use His Influence at HUD to Help His Business*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/documents-reveal-ben-carson-jr-s-attempts-to-use-his-influence-at-hud-to-help-his-business>.

government's efforts to sell nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia;<sup>10</sup> posting records and analysis regarding the Department of Justice's decision in response to demands from Congress to direct a U.S. Attorney to undertake a wide-ranging review and make recommendations regarding criminal investigations relating to the President's political opponents and allegations of misconduct by the Department of Justice itself and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

### **Guidance Regarding the Search & Processing of Requested Records**

In connection with its request for records, American Oversight provides the following guidance regarding the scope of the records sought and the search and processing of records:

- Please search all locations and systems likely to have 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.
- Please search all relevant records or systems containing records regarding agency business. Do not exclude records regarding agency business contained in files, email accounts, or devices in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts or text messages. Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.<sup>12</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

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<sup>10</sup> *Investigating the Trump Administration's Efforts to Sell Nuclear Technology to Saudi Arabia*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigating-the-trump-administrations-efforts-to-sell-nuclear-technology-to-saudi-arabia>.

<sup>11</sup> *Sessions' Letter Shows DOJ Acted On Trump's Authoritarian Demand to Investigate Clinton*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/sessions-letter>.

<sup>12</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).

even if material has not yet been moved to official systems or if officials have, by intent or through negligence, failed to meet their obligations.<sup>13</sup>

- Please use all tools available to your agency to conduct a complete and efficient search for potentially responsive records. Agencies are subject to government-wide requirements to manage agency information electronically,<sup>14</sup> and many agencies have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies. These systems provide options for searching emails and other electronic records in a manner that is reasonably likely to be more complete than just searching individual custodian files. For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but your agency’s archiving tools may capture that email under Capstone. At the same time, custodian searches are still necessary; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.
- 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 a request is denied in whole, please state specifically why it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.
- Please take appropriate steps to ensure that records responsive to this request are not deleted by the agency before the completion of processing for this request. If records potentially responsive to this request are likely to be located on systems where they are subject to potential deletion, including on a scheduled basis, please take steps to prevent that deletion, including, as appropriate, by instituting a litigation hold on those records.

## **Conclusion**

If you have any questions regarding how to construe this request for records or believe that further discussions regarding search and processing would facilitate a more efficient production of records of interest to American Oversight, please do not hesitate to contact American Oversight to discuss this request. American Oversight welcomes an opportunity to discuss its request with you before you undertake your search or incur search or

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<sup>13</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).

<sup>14</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>.

duplication costs. By working together at the outset, American Oversight and your agency can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

Where possible, please provide responsive material in an electronic format by email. Alternatively, please provide responsive material in native format or in PDF 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.

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, please contact Hart Wood at [foia@americanoversight.org](mailto:foia@americanoversight.org) or 202.873.1743. 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