



July 17, 2020

**VIA EMAIL**

HHSC Open Records Coordinator  
MC-1070  
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.  
Austin, TX 78751-2316  
[OpenRecordsRequest@hhsc.state.tx.us](mailto:OpenRecordsRequest@hhsc.state.tx.us)

**Re: Public Information Request**

Dear Public Information Officer:

Pursuant to the Texas Public Information Act, as codified at Tex. Code ch. 552, American Oversight makes the following request for public records.

Technology surveillance companies have responded to the pandemic by offering their products to federal, state, and local government agencies. At the same time, many experts have raised concerns about the privacy implications of these collaborations.<sup>1</sup>

American Oversight requests records to help the public better understand surveillance companies' role in COVID response efforts.

**Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that your office promptly produce the following:

All email communications (including email messages, complete email chains, email attachments, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) between (A) the officials in Column A, and (B) anyone communicating on behalf of the entities listed in Column B, including, but not limited to, anyone communicating with an email address ending in the domain(s) provided.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Nick Paton Walsh, *9/11 Saw Much of Our Privacy Swept Aside. Coronavirus Could End It Altogether*, CNN (May 16, 2020, 1:27 PM), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/16/tech/surveillance-privacy-coronavirus-npw-intl/index.html>; Opinion, Christine Wilson, *Coronavirus Demands a Privacy Law*, Wall St. J. (May 13, 2020, 6:58 PM), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/congress-needs-to-pass-a-coronavirus-privacy-law-11589410686>; Sue Halpern, *Can We Track COVID-19 and Protect Privacy at the Same Time*, The New Yorker, Apr. 27, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/can-we-track-covid-19-and-protect-privacy-at-the-same-time>.



Column A: Government Officials	Column B: Companies
i. Acting Executive Commissioner, Phil Wilson	i. Palantir Technologies (@palantir.com or @palantirtech.com)
ii. Commissioner John William Hellerstedt, MD	ii. Clearview AI, Inc. (@clearview.ai)
iii. Deputy Commissioner Jennifer Sims	iii. Vantiq (@vantiq.com)
iv. Chief Information Officer Ricardo Blanco	iv. Camber Systems (@cornea.is)
	v. NSO (@nsogroup.com)
	vi. AiRISTA Flow (@airistaflow.com)
	vii. SuperCom (@supercom.com)

Please provide all responsive records from March 15, 2020, to the date of the search.

We understand that your office’s capacity may be impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak and response efforts. Should that be the case, we would be happy to discuss potential streamlining or narrowing of our request, reasonable delays in processing this request, or other accommodations. Please feel free to contact us at the telephone number listed in the final paragraph of this letter; we look forward to working with you.

American Oversight seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. Our request includes any attachments to these records. **No category of material should be omitted from search, collection, and production.**

In addition, American Oversight insists that your office 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; governmental authorities may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.**

Please search all records regarding official business. **You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts.** Emails conducting government business sent or received on the personal account of a governmental authority’s officer or employee constitutes a record for purposes of the Texas Public Information Act.<sup>2</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

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<sup>2</sup> Tex. Code § 552.002(a-2); see also *Adkisson v. Paxton*, 459 S.W.3d 761, 773 (Tex. App. 2015).

document. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically that 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 your office 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.

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, American Oversight and your office 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 Tex. Code § 552.267(a), American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records because such a waiver “is in the public interest because providing the copy of the information primarily benefits the general public.” The requested records are directly related to the work of state officials, with the potential to shed light on how the Texas government has responded to the COVID pandemic. This issue is a subject of substantial public interest in Texas, and broadly across the nation. Many people, including Texans, are concerned about the privacy concerns of digital contact tracing and the consequences of the state, as well as the private companies they employ, having access to personal information regarding their health, contacts, and locations. Information from this request can better help the public understand the security and privacy protections in place concerning their data.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, release of records that may help the public understand the operations and activities of state officials is in the public interest.

Release of the requested records will primarily benefit the public.<sup>4</sup> As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the requested records is not in American Oversight’s financial interest, but is rather in the public interest. American

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<sup>3</sup> Omar L. Gallaga, *CORONAVIRUS IN TEXAS: Delays, Privacy Concerns Slow Efforts to Track the Virus Using Digital Contact Tracing.*, Statesman (May 29, 2020, 10:16 AM), <https://www.statesman.com/business/20200529/coronavirus-in-texas-delays-privacy-concerns-slow-efforts-to-track-virus-using-digital-contact-tracing>

<sup>4</sup> Tex. Code § 552.267(a).

Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses governmental authorities provide to public records requests publicly available. As noted, the subject of this request is a matter of public interest, and the public would benefit from an enhanced understanding of the government's activities through American Oversight's analysis and publication of these records. 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 the organization's State Accountability Project covering voting rights issues in various states;<sup>7</sup> 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>8</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>9</sup> posting records regarding potential self-dealing at the Department of Housing & Urban Development and related analysis;<sup>10</sup> posting records and analysis

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<sup>5</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 15,600 followers on Facebook and 104,000 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited June 30, 2020); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited June 30, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> News, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

<sup>7</sup> State Accountability Project, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/state-accountability-project>.

<sup>8</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>9</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>10</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>.

relating to the federal government's efforts to sell nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia;<sup>11</sup> and 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>12</sup>

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver. If your office denies our request for a fee waiver, please notify American Oversight of any anticipated fees or costs in excess of \$40 prior to incurring such costs or fees.

### Conclusion

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with you 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 Christine Monahan at [records@americanoversight.org](mailto:records@americanoversight.org) or (202) 869-5244. 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 that reads "Austin R. Evers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

Austin R. Evers  
Executive Director  
American Oversight

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<sup>11</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>12</sup> *Sessions' Letter Shows DOJ Acted on Trump's Authoritarian Demand to Investigate Clinton*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/sessions-letter>.