



September 16, 2020

**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL**

Open Records Custodian  
Office of the Secretary of State  
214 State Capitol  
Atlanta, GA 30334  
[openrecords@sos.ga.gov](mailto:openrecords@sos.ga.gov)

**Re: Open Records Request**

Dear Records Custodian:

Pursuant to the Georgia Open Records Law (O.C.G.A. § 50-18-70 *et seq.*), American Oversight makes the following request for records.

Georgia's primary elections were held on June 9, 2020, plagued by long lines and other issues that were expected to delay the reporting of the results of some races for multiple days.<sup>1</sup> Many officials, including Chief Operating Officer and Voting Implementation Manager Gabriel Sterling, criticized the training process of poll workers.<sup>2</sup>

**Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that your office produce the following within three business days, or provide a written description of any responsive records with a timetable for their production within three business days:

All email communications (email messages, email attachments, and complete chains) and all messages on The Buzz messaging platform (including, but not limited to, messages sent on personal, non-governmental, or nonofficial devices regarding official state business) sent by Chief Operating Officer and Voting Implementation Manager Gabriel Sterling from June 9, 2020, to June 16, 2020.

In an effort to accommodate the Office of the Secretary of State and reduce the number of potentially responsive records to be processed and produced, American Oversight has limited its request to communications sent by Mr. Sterling. To be clear, however, American

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark Niesse, *Vote Counting Continues After Problems in Georgia's Primary*, Atlanta J. Const., June 10, 2020, <https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/vote-counting-continues-after-problems-georgia-primary/fKGdKvpG5Y93iKCwguzamJ/>.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Mark Niesse & Alan Judd, *Election Fiasco Reveals Flaws with Georgia's New Voting System*, Atlanta J. Const., June 14, 2020, <https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/election-fiasco-reveals-flaws-with-georgia-new-voting-system/FoZjtLGPYccOrHzXHiPbDL/>.



Oversight still requests that complete email/message chains be produced, displaying both sent and received messages. This means, for example, that both (i) Mr. Sterling's response to an email and (ii) the initial received message are responsive to this request and should be produced.

Please notify American Oversight of any anticipated fees or costs in excess of \$100 prior to incurring such costs or fees.

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; your office 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 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. 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 the Secretary of State 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.

### Conclusion

American Oversight is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with the mission 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>3</sup>

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 Khahilia Shaw at [records@americanoversight.org](mailto:records@americanoversight.org) or 202.539.6507.

Sincerely,



Austin R. Evers  
Executive Director  
American Oversight

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<sup>3</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 15,600 page likes on Facebook and 104,500 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Sept. 13, 2020); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Sept. 13, 2020).