



January 26, 2023

VIA EMAIL

Lauren Downey
Public Information Coordinator
Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, TX 78711
publicrecords@texasattorneygeneral.gov

Re: Public Information Request

Dear Public Information Coordinator Downey:

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

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that the Texas Office of the Attorney General promptly produce the following:

1. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, complete email chains, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) sent by any of the officials listed below to any email addresses ending in .com, .net, .org, .mail, .me, .us, .edu, .law, or .legal containing any of the search terms listed below.

Attorney General's Office Officials:

- i. Ken Paxton, Attorney General (or anyone communicating on his behalf, such as an assistant or scheduler)
- ii. Brent Webster, First Assistant Attorney General
- iii. Lesley French, Chief of Staff
- iv. Judd Stone, Solicitor General
- v. Shawn Cowles, Deputy Attorney General for Civil Litigation

Search Terms:

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|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| i. "Student debt" | x. "Student aid" |
| ii. "Student loan" | xi. "Loan forgiveness" |
| iii. "Student loans" | xii. "Loan cancellation" |
| iv. "Education debt" | xiii. "Loan relief" |
| v. "Education loan" | xiv. "Debt forgiveness" |
| vi. "Education loans" | xv. "Debt cancellation" |
| vii. "College debt" | xvi. "Debt relief" |
| viii. "College loan" | xvii. Pell |
| ix. "College loans" | xviii. "Heroes Act" |



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|--------|------------------------|---------|---|
| xix. | “Relief Opportunities” | xxv. | “Brown v. U.S. Department of Education” |
| xx. | “Nebraska v. Biden” | | |
| xxi. | “Biden v. Nebraska” | | |
| xxii. | “Arizona v. Biden” | xxvi. | “Brown County” |
| xxiii. | “AZ v. Biden” | xxvii. | Garrison |
| xxiv. | “Brnovich v. Biden” | xxviii. | Cato |

For part one of this request, in an effort to accommodate your office and reduce the number of potentially responsive records to be processed and produced, American Oversight has limited the request to emails sent by the specified officials. To be clear, however, American Oversight still requests that complete email chains be produced, displaying both sent and received messages, and any document attachments therein.

2. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, complete email chains, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) between (1) any of the officials listed above in part one, and (b) any of the external parties listed below (including, but not limited to, at the listed email addresses and/or domains).

External Parties:

- i. John Malcolm (john.malcolm@heritage.org), and anyone communicating on behalf of the Heritage Foundation (heritage.org and heritageaction.com)
- ii. Bernie Marcus, Alfredo Ortiz (alfredo.ortiz@jobcreatorsnetwork.com), and anyone communicating on behalf of the Job Creators Network (jobcreatorsnetwork.com)
- iii. Caleb Kruckenberg (ckruckenberg@pacificallegal.org), Michael Poon (mpoon@pacificallegal.org), and anyone communicating on behalf of Pacific Legal Foundation (pacificallegal.org)
- iv. Anyone communicating on behalf of Cato Institute (cato.org)
- v. Anyone communicating on behalf of CRC Advisors (crcadvisors.com)
- vi. J. Michael Connolly (mike@consvoymccarthy.com), James F. Hasson (james@consvoymccarthy.com), Matthew Pociask (matt@consvoymccarthy.com), Steven C. Begakis (steven@consvoymccarthy.com), and anyone communicating on behalf of Consvooy McCarthy (consvoymccarthy.com)
- vii. Richard M. Esenberg (rick@will-law.org), Daniel P. Lennington (dan@will-law.org), and anyone communicating on behalf of Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (will-law.org)
- viii. Mark Chenoweth (mark.chenoweth@ncla.legal), Sheng Li (Sheng.Li@ncla.legal), Russell G. Ryan (Russ.Ryan@ncla.legal), and anyone communicating on behalf of New Civil Liberties Alliance (ncla.legal)

For part two of this request, please note that American Oversight does not seek, and that this request specifically excludes, the initial mailing of news

clips or other mass distribution emails. However, subsequent communications forwarding such emails are responsive to this request. In other words, for example, if Attorney General Paxton received a mass-distribution newsletter email from the Heritage Foundation, that initial email would not be responsive to this request. However, if Attorney General Paxton forwarded that email to another individual with his own commentary, that subsequent message would be responsive to this request and should be produced.

3. All text messages or messages on messaging platforms (such as Slack, GChat or Google Hangouts, Lync, Skype, Twitter direct messages, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, or Parler) sent or received by Attorney General Ken Paxton, First Assistant Attorney General Brent Webster, Chief of Staff Lesley French, Solicitor General Judd Stone, or Deputy Attorney General for Civil Litigation Shawn Cowles containing any of the search terms listed below.

Search Terms:

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| i. "Student debt" | xvi. "Debt relief" |
| ii. "Student loan" | xvii. Pell |
| iii. "Student loans" | xviii. "Heroes Act" |
| iv. "Education debt" | xix. "Relief Opportunities" |
| v. "Education loan" | xx. "Nebraska v. Biden" |
| vi. "Education loans" | xxi. "Biden v. Nebraska" |
| vii. "College debt" | xxii. "Arizona v. Biden" |
| viii. "College loan" | xxiii. "AZ v. Biden" |
| ix. "College loans" | xxiv. "Brnovich v. Biden" |
| x. "Student aid" | xxv. "Brown v. U.S. Department of Education" |
| xi. "Loan forgiveness" | |
| xii. "Loan cancellation" | |
| xiii. "Loan relief" | xxvi. "Brown County" |
| xiv. "Debt forgiveness" | xxvii. Garrison |
| xv. "Debt cancellation" | xxviii. Cato |

For part three of this request, to be clear, American Oversight requests that full text message threads/conversations be produced. For example, if Attorney General Paxton sent a text message containing the term "Pell," the complete thread/conversation spanning one day prior to the sending of the text message through one day following the sending of the text message should be produced, and not just the message containing the key term.

4. All text messages or messages on messaging platforms (such as Slack, GChat or Google Hangouts, Lync, Skype, Twitter direct messages, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, or Parler) between (1) Attorney General Ken Paxton, and (2) any of the external individuals listed below.

External Parties:

- i. Steve Marshall, Alabama Attorney General

- ii. Treg Taylor, Alaska Attorney General
- iii. Mark Brnovich, Arizona Attorney General
- iv. Leslie Rutledge, Arkansas Attorney General
- v. Ashley Moody, Florida Attorney General
- vi. Chris Carr, Georgia Attorney General
- vii. Lawrence Wasden, Idaho Attorney General
- viii. Derek Schmidt, Kansas Attorney General
- ix. Todd Rokita, Indiana Attorney General
- x. Daniel Cameron, Kentucky Attorney General
- xi. Jeff Landry, Louisiana Attorney General
- xii. Lynn Fitch, Mississippi Attorney General
- xiii. Eric Schmitt, Missouri Attorney General
- xiv. Austin Knudsen, Montana Attorney General
- xv. Doug Peterson, Nebraska Attorney General
- xvi. John Formella, New Hampshire Attorney General
- xvii. Drew Wrigley, North Dakota Attorney General
- xviii. Dave Yost, Ohio Attorney General
- xix. John O'Connor, Oklahoma Attorney General
- xx. Alan Wilson, South Carolina Attorney General
- xxi. Mark Vargo, South Dakota Attorney General
- xxii. Jonathan Skrmetti, Tennessee Attorney General
- xxiii. Sean Reyes, Utah Attorney General
- xxiv. Jason Miyares, Virginia Attorney General
- xxv. Patrick Morrissey, West Virginia Attorney General
- xxvi. Bridget Hill, Wyoming Attorney General

For all parts of this request, please provide all responsive records from August 24, 2022, through the date the search is conducted.

American Oversight seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. In conducting your search, please understand the term “record” in its 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.**

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.¹

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 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 any involvement by the Texas Office of the Attorney General in the opposition to President Biden’s student loan relief plan. This matter is a subject of substantial public interest in Texas.² Accordingly, release of records that may

¹ Tex. Code § 552.002(a-2); *see also Adkisson v. Paxton*, 459 S.W.3d 761, 773 (Tex. App. 2015).

² Tony Romm, Jeff Stein, and Daneille Douglas-Gabriel, *Republicans are Ready to Sue to Block Biden’s Student Debt Plan*, Wash. Post (Sept. 1, 2022, 10:07 AM),

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.³ 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 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.⁴

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.⁵ 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 investigations into misconduct and corruption in state governments;⁶ the posting of records related to the Trump Administration's contacts with Ukraine and analyses of those contacts;⁷ posting records and editorial content about the federal government's response to the Coronavirus pandemic;⁸ 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

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2022/09/01/republicans-sue-biden-student-debt/>.

³ Tex. Code § 552.267(a).

⁴ American Oversight currently has approximately 16,000 followers on Facebook and 113,100 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Jan. 12, 2023); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Jan. 12, 2023).

⁵ *News*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

⁶ *State Investigations*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/states>.

⁷ *Trump Administration's Contacts with Ukraine*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-contacts-with-ukraine>.

⁸ *See generally The Trump Administration's Response to Coronavirus*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-response-to-coronavirus>; *see, e.g., CDC Calendars from 2018 and 2019: Pandemic-Related Briefings and Meetings*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/cdc-calendars-from-2018-and-2019-pandemic-related-briefings-and-meetings>.

U.S.-Mexico border, and analyses of what those records reveal;⁹ 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;¹⁰ and posting records and analysis of federal officials' use of taxpayer dollars to charter private aircraft or use government planes for unofficial business.¹¹

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 your county 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 Emma Lewis at records@americanoversight.org or (202) 919-6303. 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,

/s/ Emma Lewis
Emma Lewis
on behalf of
American Oversight

⁹ 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>.

¹⁰ *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>.

¹¹ See generally *Swamp Airlines: Chartered Jets at Taxpayer Expense*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/swamp-airlines-private-jets-taxpayer-expense>; see, e.g., *New Information on Pompeo's 2017 Trips to His Home State*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/new-information-on-pompeos-2017-trips-to-his-home-state>.