



September 20, 2023

**VIA EMAIL**

Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger  
16 W. Jones St., Rm. 2007  
Raleigh, NC 27601  
[Phil.Berger@ncleg.gov](mailto:Phil.Berger@ncleg.gov)

**Re: Public Records Act Request**

Dear Senate President Berger:

Pursuant to the North Carolina Public Records Act, as codified at North Carolina General Statutes ch. 132, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

**Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that your office produce the following records as promptly as possible:

1. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) and text messages (including complete text message threads or conversations) sent or received by Senator Phil Berger or his Legislative Assistant Abbigail Clark containing any of the search terms listed below.

**Search Terms:**

- i. "Judicial Standards Commission"
- ii. "implicit bias"
- iii. race
- iv. diversity
- v. JSC
- vi. Earls
- vii. Anita
- viii. Dubay
- ix. Pinkham

To be clear, for the portion of this request seeking text messages, American Oversight requests that full text message threads/conversations be produced. For example, if Senator Berger sent or received a text message containing any of the key terms listed above, the complete thread/conversation for the timeframe listed below should be produced, and not just the message containing the key term.



In addition, please note that American Oversight does not seek, and that part 1 of 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. For example, if Senator Berger received a mass-distribution news clip email containing the term “Judicial Standards Commission,” that initial email would not be responsive to this request. However, if Senator Berger forwarded that email to another individual with his own commentary, that subsequent message would be responsive to this request and should be produced.

2. All records in possession of Senator Berger related to the restructuring of the Judicial Standards Commission, including, but not limited to, summaries, reports, and impact assessments.<sup>1</sup>

For both items of this request, please provide all responsive records from June 20, 2023, through the date the search is conducted.

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

### **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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> For further identifying information, please see, Mehr Sher, *Proposed Changes to N.C. Judicial Standards Commission Raise Concerns About Judicial Integrity and Oversight, Part Two*, Carolina Public Press, July 21, 2023, <https://carolinapublicpress.org/60805/proposed-changes-to-n-c-judicial-standards-commission-raise-concerns-about-judicial-integrity-and-oversight-part-two/#:~:text=The%20changes%20proposed%20by%20the,the%20members%20on%20the%20commission.>

<sup>2</sup> N.C. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 132-1(a) (public records consist of documentary material “regardless of physical form or characteristics.”).

- Our request for records includes any attachments to those records or other materials enclosed with those records when they were previously transmitted. To the extent that an email is responsive to our request, our request includes all prior messages sent or received in that email chain, as well as any attachments to the email.
- 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 Public Records Act.<sup>3</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 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.

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 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.

---

<sup>3</sup> See Atty. Gen. Josh Stein, *North Carolina Open Government Guide at 22* (2019), <https://ncdoj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019-Open-Government-Guide-2.pdf> (“Emails about official business are public records even if they are sent using the personal email account of an employee or official.”).

## 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.com.<sup>4</sup>

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 Rachel Baron at [records@americanoversight.org](mailto:records@americanoversight.org) or (202) 897-2465.

Sincerely,

/s/ Rachel Baron

Rachel Baron  
on behalf of  
American Oversight

---

<sup>4</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 16,000 followers on Facebook and 111,800 followers on Twitter.com. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Sept. 20, 2023); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter.com, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Sept. 20, 2023).