



September 29, 2023

**VIA EMAIL**

North Dakota Department of Health & Human Services  
600 East Boulevard Avenue, Dept. 325  
Bismark, ND 580505  
[dhseo@nd.gov](mailto:dhseo@nd.gov)

**Re: Open Records Law Request**

Dear Open Records Officer:

Pursuant to the North Dakota Open Records Law, N.D.C.C. §§ 44-04-18 et seq., and Section 6 of Article XI of the North Dakota Constitution, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

**Requested Records**

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

1. All final assessments, reports, analyses, recommendations, scientific research, or guidance prepared by your office, other state or local offices, or independent experts, and in the possession of the North Dakota Department of Health & Human Services officials listed below, regarding gender-affirming care for individuals under the age of 18, including, but not limited to, records related to the following:
  - a. Any proposals shared with the North Dakota Office of the Governor or North Dakota State Legislature regarding regulations governing the treatment of gender dysphoria for children and adolescents;
  - b. Any projected or actual impacts of the recently enacted restrictions on gender-affirming care procedures for minors in North Dakota, including, but not limited to, House Bill 1254.<sup>1</sup>

Officials:

- i. Commissioner Chris Jones
  - ii. Deputy Commissioner Sara Stolt
2. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, complete email chains, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) between (a) the officials listed above in part 1, or anyone communicating on

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<sup>1</sup> For further identifying information, please see Trisha Ahmed, *North Dakota Governor Signs Law Limiting Trans Health Care*, Associated Press (Apr. 20, 2023, 11:13 AM), <https://apnews.com/article/north-dakota-transgender-health-care-minors-68c86fdb600b357013540fa32d4fba3>.



their behalf, such as an assistant or scheduler, and (b) the external entities listed below (including, but not limited to, anyone communicating from an email address ending in the listed domains).

External Entities:

- i. Alliance Defending Freedom (adflegal.org)
- ii. Family Policy Alliance (familypolicyalliance.com)
- iii. American College of Pediatricians (acpeds.org)
- iv. American Family Association (afa.net)
- v. Concerned Women for America (concernedwomen.org or cwfa.org)
- vi. Heritage Foundation (heritage.org or heritageaction.com)
- vii. Family Research Council (frc.org or fraction.org)
- viii. America First Legal (aflegal.org or athospr.com)
- ix. Independent Women's Forum (iwf.org)
- x. Eagle Forum (eagleforum.org)
- xi. American Principles Project (americanprinciplesproject.org)
- xii. Liberty Counsel (lc.org)
- xiii. Ethics and Public Policy Center (eppc.org)
- xiv. Manhattan Institute (manhattaninstitute.org)
- xv. Do No Harm (donoharmmedicine.org)

Please also 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 an official received a mass-distribution news clip from an email address ending in adflegal.org, that initial email would not be responsive to this request. However, if an official forwarded that email to another individual with their own commentary, that subsequent message would be responsive to this request and should be produced.

Please provide all responsive records from January 1, 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.
- 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 Open Records Law.<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.<sup>3</sup> If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically why it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release. Furthermore, if a request is denied in whole or in part, please describe the legal authority for the denial or, if applicable, provide a statement that the records do not exist.<sup>4</sup>
- 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.

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<sup>2</sup> See N.D.A.G. 2014-O-20 (records contained on public employee's personal device); N.D.A.G. 2014-O-10 (private email account used to generate or receive emails containing "public business"); N.D.A.G. 2008-O-15 (emails on home computers).

<sup>3</sup> N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18.10 (1), (2).

<sup>4</sup> N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18(7).

## **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>5</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 Taylor Stoneman at [records@americanoversight.org](mailto:records@americanoversight.org) or (202) 848-1319.

Sincerely,

/s/ Taylor Stoneman  
Taylor Stoneman  
on behalf of  
American Oversight

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<sup>5</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 16,000 followers on Facebook and 111,700 followers on Twitter.com. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Sept. 28, 2023); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter.com, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Sept. 28, 2023).