AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

February 22, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Melissa Golden
Lead Paralegal and FOIA Specialist
Office of Legal Counsel
Room 5511, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Department of Justice
Washington, DC 20530-0001
E-mail: usdoj-officeoflegalcounsel@usdoj.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Ms. Golden:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), 28 C.F.R. Part 16, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that DOJ produce the following within twenty business days:

1. All legal advice signed by former Deputy Assistant Attorney General Joan Larsen provided outside the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC), including formal opinions, informal advice, and file memos, talking points, or other documents memorializing oral advice.

2. All final talking points prepared for Ms. Larsen for communications outside OLC.

3. Any cover sheet for any OLC opinion or advice issued by OLC where Ms. Larson is listed as the primary or secondary deputy assistant attorney general.

4. All calendars or calendar entries for Ms. Larsen, including any calendars maintained on her behalf (*e.g.*, by an administrative assistant or scheduler). American Oversight requests that the calendars be produced in a format that includes all invitees, any notes, and all attachments. Please do not limit your search to Outlook calendars. We request the production of any document—paper or electronic, whether on government-issued or personal devices—used to track or coordinate how Ms. Larsen allocated her time on agency business.

5. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, and calendar invitations) that include 1) Ms. Larsen and 2) any email addresses ending in .com/.net/.org/.edu/.mail.

6. All communications (including hard copy correspondence and enclosures, emails, email attachments, text messages, messages on messaging platforms (such as AOL Instant Messenger), calendar invitations, or calendar entries) that include (1) Ms. Larsen and (2) anyone in the White House Counsel's Office (WHCO) as senders, recipients, or copied individuals on the communication. Where Ms. Larsen or anyone in the WHCO was the sender, recipient, or included as a copied individual on an email or message chain, we seek all communications or messages contained in that chain, including any attachments.

Please provide all responsive records from January 1, 2002, through December 31, 2003.

American Oversight seeks all 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. 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.**

Please search all records regarding agency business. **You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts.** Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.[1] **It is not adequate to rely on policies and procedures that require officials to move such information to official systems within a certain period of time; American Oversight has a right to records contained in those files even if material has not yet been moved to official systems or if officials have, through negligence or willfulness, failed to meet their obligations.**[2]

In addition, please note that in conducting a "reasonable search" as required by law, you must employ the most up-to-date technologies and tools available, in addition to searches by individual custodians likely to have responsive information. Recent technology may have rendered DOJ's prior FOIA practices unreasonable. **In light of the government-wide requirements to manage**

[1] *See Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, 827 F.3d 145, 149–50 (D.C. Cir. 2016); *cf. Judicial Watch, Inc. v. Kerry*, 844 F.3d 952, 955–56 (D.C. Cir. 2016).

[2] *See Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016) ("The Government argues that because the agency had a policy requiring [the official] to forward all of his emails from his [personal] account to his business email, the [personal] account only contains duplicate agency records at best. Therefore, the Government claims that any hypothetical deletion of the [personal account] emails would still leave a copy of those records intact in [the official's] work email. However, policies are rarely followed to perfection by anyone. At this stage of the case, the Court cannot assume that each and every work-related email in the [personal] account was duplicated in [the official's] work email account." (citations omitted)).

information electronically by the end of 2016, it is no longer reasonable to rely exclusively on custodian-driven searches.[3] **Furthermore, agencies that have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies, now maintain emails in a form that is reasonably likely to be more complete than individual custodians' files.** For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but DOJ's archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insists that DOJ 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; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.**

Under the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, agencies must adopt a presumption of disclosure, withholding information "only if . . . disclosure would harm an interest protected by an exemption" or "disclosure is prohibited by law."[4] If it is your position that any portion of the requested records is exempt from disclosure, American Oversight requests that you provide an index of those documents as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973), *cert. denied*, 415 U.S. 977 (1974). As you are aware, a *Vaughn* index must describe each document claimed as exempt with sufficient specificity "to permit a reasoned judgment as to whether the material is actually exempt under FOIA."[5] Moreover, the *Vaughn* index "must describe *each* document or portion thereof withheld, and for *each* withholding it must discuss the consequences of disclosing the sought-after information."[6] Further, "the withholding agency must supply 'a relatively detailed justification, specifically identifying the reasons why a particular exemption is relevant and correlating those claims with the particular part of a withheld document to which they apply.'"[7]

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.[8] Claims of nonsegregability must be made with the same degree of detail as required for claims of exemptions in a *Vaughn* index. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically that it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.

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[3] Presidential Memorandum—Managing Government Records, 76 Fed. Reg. 75,423 (Nov. 28, 2011), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/28/presidential-memorandum-managing-government-records; Office of Mgmt. & Budget, Exec. Office of the President, Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments & Independent Agencies, "Managing Government Records Directive," M-12-18 (Aug. 24, 2012), https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf.

[4] FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114–185).

[5] *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

[6] *King v. U.S. Dep't of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223–24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphases in original).

[7] *Id.* at 224 (citing *Mead Data Central, Inc. v. U.S. Dep't of the Air Force*, 566 F.2d 242, 251 (D.C. Cir. 1977)).

[8] *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

You should institute a preservation hold on information responsive to this request. American Oversight intends to pursue all legal avenues to enforce its right of access under FOIA, including litigation if necessary. Accordingly, DOJ is on notice that litigation is reasonably foreseeable.

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 DOJ 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 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and 28 C.F.R. § 16.10(k), American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. The subject of this request concerns the operations of the federal government, and the disclosures will likely contribute to a better understanding of relevant government procedures by the general public in a significant way.[9] Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.[10]

American Oversight requests a waiver of fees because disclosure of the requested information is "in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of operations or activities of the government."[11] Judge Joan Larsen has been named to a shortlist of candidates for a nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court, should another opening become available during the current administration.[12] Supreme Court appointments are clearly matters of substantial public interest.[13] The requested records relate directly to operations and activities of the government—namely, Judge Larsen's handling of official business during her time as Deputy Assistant Attorney General in OLC. The public has a right to understand the public service record

[9] 28 C.F.R. § 16.10(k)(2).
[10] *Id.*
[11] 28 C.F.R. § 16.10(k)(2)(i), (ii)(A)–(B).
[12] *See* Eliana Johnson & Gabby Orr, *Trump White House Urging Allies to Prepare for Possible RBG Departure*, POLITICO (Jan. 10, 2019, 1:04 PM), https://www.politico.com/story/2019/01/10/trump-white-house-urging-allies-to-prepare-for-possible-rbg-departure-1096102.
[13] *See* Ann E. Marimow, *Two Years in, Trump's Appeals Court Confirmations at a Historic High Point*, WASH. POST, Feb. 4, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/two-years-in-trumps-appeals-court-confirmations-at-a-historic-high-point/2019/02/03/574226e6-1a90-11e9-9ebf-c5fed1b7a081_story.html?utm_term=.aa705b2e076c; Ramesh Ponnuru, *The Trump Supreme Court Contingency Plan*, BLOOMBERG (Feb. 5, 2019, 7:30 AM), https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-02-05/trump-has-a-list-of-supreme-court-nominees.

of a potential Supreme Court nominee, including how she conducted herself fulfilling her duties as a deputy assistant attorney general. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses agencies provide to FOIA requests publicly available, and the public's understanding of the government's activities would be enhanced through American Oversight's analysis and publication of these records.

This request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.[14] As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the information requested is not in American Oversight's financial interest. 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.[15] American Oversight has demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content. For example, after receiving records regarding an ethics waiver received by a senior DOJ attorney,[16] American Oversight promptly posted the records to its website and published an analysis of what the records reflected about DOJ's process for ethics waivers.[17] As another example, American Oversight has a project called "Audit the Wall," where the organization is gathering and analyzing information and commenting on public releases of information related to the administration's proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border.[18]

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

Conclusion

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with DOJ on this request. If you do not understand any part of this request, please contact Katherine Anthony at foia@americanoversight.org or 202.897.3918. Also, if

[14] 28 C.F.R. § 16.10(k)(iii)(A)–(B).
[15] American Oversight currently has over 12,150 page likes on Facebook, and approximately 50,700 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/ (last visited Feb. 22, 2019); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, https://twitter.com/weareoversight (last visited Feb. 22, 2019).
[16] *DOJ Records Relating to Solicitor General Noel Francisco's Recusal*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance.
[17] *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.
[18] *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall.

American Oversight's request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

Sincerely,

Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight