



January 29, 2020

VIA EMAIL

Michael Marquis
Freedom of Information Officer
Department of Health and Human
Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
Room 729H
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201
FOIARequest@hhs.gov

Hugh Gilmore
Freedom of Information Officer
U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid
Services
North Building, Room N2-20-06
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, Maryland 21244
FOIA_Request@cms.hhs.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear FOIA Officers:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations of your agency, 45 C.F.R. Part 5, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

In December 2019, Politico reported that Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Seema Verma filed a \$47,000 reimbursement claim for lost property, including \$43,065 for stolen jewelry, with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).¹

American Oversight seeks records to shed light on Ms. Verma's other reimbursement requests and expenditures of public funds during her time in office.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that HHS and CMS produce the following records within twenty business days:

1. All records reflecting any actual, projected, or requested expenditures for renovations (including remodeling or changes to décor) of any part of the office suites (including foyers, waiting rooms, conference rooms, adjacent

¹ Dan Diamond, *Medicare Chief Asked Taxpayers to Cover Stolen Jewelry*, POLITICO (Dec. 7, 2019, 9:33 PM), <https://www.politico.com/news/2019/12/07/medicare-chief-asked-taxpayers-to-cover-stolen-jewelry-077761>.



hallways, or other common areas) for or used by CMS Administrator Seema Verma.

2. All records reflecting costs reimbursed or paid directly by your agency for any expenses attributable to Ms. Verma. Payments or reimbursements include any payments associated with travel (including the travel of any staff or security detail assigned to Ms. Verma), long-term housing, the cost of government transportation, individual airfare for Ms. Verma and/or her spouse, lodging, meals, per diem payments, rental vehicles, overtime payments, payments made via government-issued charge cards or travel cards, or any other expenses.
3. All records reflecting requests for reimbursement submitted to your agency attributable to Ms. Verma, including those not ultimately reimbursed. Responsive records should include documentation of the nature of the reimbursement requests, including but not limited to receipts, expense reports, invoices, appraisals, and any other documents used to justify the reimbursement request. Such requests may be submitted directly by Ms. Verma or may have been submitted on her behalf by other employees.

For all parts of this request, please provide all responsive records from March 14, 2017, to the date the search is conducted.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and your agency's regulations, 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. Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.

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."² The public has a significant interest in understanding how taxpayer dollars are being spent by public officials of the government entity responsible for overseeing national health care programs. Records with the potential to shed light on this issue would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the federal government, including by revealing whether officials are appropriately spending public funds. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses agencies provide to FOIA requests

² 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

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.³ 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.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 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;⁶ 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 U.S.-Mexico border, and analyses of what those records reveal;⁷ posting records regarding potential self-dealing at the Department of Housing & Urban Development and related analysis;⁸ posting records and analysis relating to the federal

³ See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

⁴ American Oversight currently has approximately 15,397 page likes on Facebook and 101,100 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Jan. 28, 2020); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Jan. 28, 2020).

⁵ News, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

⁶ 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>.

⁷ 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>.

⁸ Documents Reveal Ben Carson Jr.'s Attempts to Use His Influence at HUD to Help His Business, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/documents-reveal-ben-carson-jr-s-attempts-to-use-his-influence-at-hud-to-help-his-business>.

government's efforts to sell nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia;⁹ and posting records and analysis regarding the Department of Justice's decision in response to demands from Congress to direct a U.S. Attorney to undertake a wide-ranging review and make recommendations regarding criminal investigations relating to the President's political opponents and allegations of misconduct by the Department of Justice itself and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.¹⁰

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

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 Federal Records Act and FOIA.¹¹ 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, by intent or through negligence, failed to meet their obligations.¹²

⁹ *Investigating the Trump Administration's Efforts to Sell Nuclear Technology to Saudi Arabia*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigating-the-trump-administrations-efforts-to-sell-nuclear-technology-to-saudi-arabia>.

¹⁰ *Sessions' Letter Shows DOJ Acted on Trump's Authoritarian Demand to Investigate Clinton*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/sessions-letter>.

¹¹ 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).

¹² See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016).

- Please use all tools available to your agency to conduct a complete and efficient search for potentially responsive records. Agencies are subject to government-wide requirements to manage agency information electronically,¹³ and many agencies have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies. These systems provide options for searching emails and other electronic records in a manner that is reasonably likely to be more complete than just searching individual custodian files. For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but your agency’s archiving tools may capture that email under Capstone. At the same time, custodian searches are still necessary; agencies 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 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.

Conclusion

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,

¹³ 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>.

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.

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 Mehreen Rasheed at foia@americanoversight.org or 202.848.1320. 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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Austin R. Evers", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight