



November 20, 2017

VIA ONLINE PORTAL & ELECTRONIC MAIL

Laurie Day
Chief, Initial Request Staff
Office of Information Policy
U.S. Department of Justice
1425 New York Avenue NW, Suite 11050
Washington, DC 20530-0001
Via FOIAOnline

Peter Chisholm
Acting Chief, Disclosure Division
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and
Explosives
U.S. Department of Justice
99 New York Avenue NE
Room 4.E-301
Washington, DC 20226
foiamail@atf.gov

David M. Hardy, Chief
Record/Information Dissemination Section
Records Management Division
Federal Bureau of Investigation
U.S. Department of Justice
170 Marcel Drive
Winchester, VA 22602-4843
Via FBI Portal

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Ms. Day, Mr. Hardy, and Mr. Chisholm:

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

On October 1, 2017, Stephen Paddock opened fire on a concert in Las Vegas killing fifty-eight people and injuring more than five hundred.¹ Since the tragedy there has been significant national debate regarding whether and to what extent gun laws need to be changed as well as what private interests are directing and influencing any policy change.² On November 5, Devin Patrick Kelley

¹ The New York Times, *Multiple Weapons Found in Las Vegas Gunman's Hotel Room*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 2, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/02/us/las-vegas-shooting.html>.

² See Daniella Diaz, *A Month After Las Vegas Shooting, There's Still No Bump Stock Regulation*, CNN (Nov. 2, 2017, 6:11 AM), <http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/01/politics/bump-stock-gun-debate-congress/index.html>; Sari Horowitz, *After Las Vegas, Gun-Control Group Seizing Moment to Push for Tighter Regulations*, WASH. POST, Oct. 17, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/after-las-vegas-gun-control-group-seizing-moment-to-push-for-tighter-regulations/2017/10/16/ee4a5472-b291-11e7-a908-a3470754bbb9_story.html?utm_term=.7eb75dbb37d2; Anthony Zurcher, *Las Vegas Shooting:*



killed twenty-six people worshipping at a Baptist church in Sutherland Springs.³ On November 14, a man killed at least four at a California elementary school and other locations around Rancho Tehama, leaving at least ten additional people injured.⁴ American Oversight submits this request to shed light on what steps the Trump administration has taken to address gun violence in the wake of the Nevada, Texas, and California shootings.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that DOJ, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (ATF) produce the following within twenty business days:

All records reflecting communications (including emails, telephone call logs, calendar invitations/entries, meeting notices, meeting agendas, informational material, draft legislation, talking points, or other materials) regarding or discussing (a) the shootings in Las Vegas, Sutherland Springs, or Rancho Tehama or (b) any changes to the current regulation of firearms, including reforms, relaxation of enforcement, or new regulatory efforts between DOJ, or its component agencies, and:

- a) The State of California, including the Office of the Governor, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, and the Office of the Attorney General—including emails sent to or from your agency with email addresses ending in “ca.gov”;
- b) The State of Nevada, including the Office of the Governor, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, and the Office of the Attorney General—including emails sent to or from your agency with email addresses ending in “@gov.nv.gov” or “@ltgov.nv.gov” or “@ag.nv.gov”; or
- c) The State of Texas, including the Office of the Governor, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, and the Office of the Attorney General—including emails sent to or from your agency with email addresses ending in “texas.gov” or “texasattorneygeneral.gov”.

The search for responsive records should include all individuals and locations where records are likely to exist, including:

- i. the Office of the Attorney General;
- ii. the Office of the Deputy Attorney General;

Five Reasons U.S. Gun Control Won't Happen, BBC, Oct. 4, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41489552>.

³ David Montgomery et al., *Gunman Kills at Least 26 in Attack on Rural Texas Church*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 5, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/05/us/church-shooting-texas.html>.

⁴ Stella Chan et al., *4 Dead After California Shootings; Gunman Tried to Enter School*, CNN (Nov. 15, 2017, 12:37 AM), <http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/14/us/california-tehama-county-shootings/index.html>.

- iii. the Office of Legislative Affairs of DOJ;
- iv. the Office of Public Affairs of DOJ;
- v. the Office of the Director of the FBI, including the Director, Deputy Director, Associate Deputy Director, Chief of Staff/Senior Counselor, and Deputy Chief of Staff;
- vi. the Office of Congressional Affairs of the FBI;
- vii. the Office of Partner Engagement of the FBI;
- viii. the Office of Public Affairs of the FBI;
- ix. the Office of the Director of ATF, including the Director, Chief of Staff, and Chief Counsel; and
- x. the Office of Public and Governmental Affairs of ATF.

Please provide all responsive records from October 1, 2017, through the date the search is conducted.

In addition to the records requested above, American Oversight also requests records describing the processing of this request, including records sufficient to identify search terms used and locations and custodians searched and any tracking sheets used to track the processing of this request. If DOJ uses FOIA questionnaires or certifications completed by individual custodians or components to determine whether they possess responsive materials or to describe how they conducted searches, we also request any such records prepared in connection with the processing of this request.

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 is subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.⁵ **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.**⁶

⁵ 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).

⁶ 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

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 information electronically by the end of 2016, it is no longer reasonable to rely exclusively on custodian-driven searches.**⁷ Furthermore, agencies that have adopted the National Archives and Records Agency (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.”⁸ 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.”⁹ 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.”¹⁰ Further, “the withholding agency must supply ‘a relatively detailed

[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)).

⁷ 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>.

⁸ FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114-185).

⁹ *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

¹⁰ *King v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223-24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphasis in original).

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.”¹¹

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.¹² 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.

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.¹³ Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.¹⁴

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

¹¹ *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)).

¹² *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

¹³ 28 C.F.R. § 16.10(k)(2).

¹⁴ *Id.*

operations or activities of the government.”¹⁵ Gun violence is a significant public-health concern in the United States. The federal government has been involved in the response to three high-profile massacres involving firearms in the last two months, and President Trump himself has commented on the massacres and the number of gun deaths in certain American cities.¹⁶ The requested records will help American Oversight and the general public understand whether and to what extent the federal government is acting to prevent gun deaths and/or to reform or monitor who has access to firearms. The debate around the scope of the Second Amendment and the extent of gun control in America is of significant public interest.¹⁷ American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses agencies provide in response to FOIA requests publicly available. As noted, the subject of this request is a matter of public interest, 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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

¹⁵ 28 C.F.R. § 16.10(k)(2)(i), (ii)(A)–(B).

¹⁶ See Peter Baker, *Trump Says Issue Is Mental Health, Not Gun Control*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 6, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/06/us/politics/trump-guns-mental-health.html>; Stella Chan et al., *supra* note 4; David Montgomery et al., *supra* note 3; The New York Times, *supra* note 1; Rick Pearson, *Trump Again Assails Chicago Gun Violence in Speech to Congress*, CHI. TRIBUNE (Mar. 1, 2017, 5:30 AM), <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/politics/ct-donald-trump-congress-speech-chicago-met-20170228-story.html>; Abigail Tracy, *Trump Tweets Condolences for Wrong Mass Shooting*, VANITY FAIR (Nov. 15, 2017, 9:57 AM), <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/11/trump-tweets-condolences-for-wrong-mass-shooting>;

¹⁷ See Justin Bank, *Right and Left React to the Las Vegas Shooting and the Gun Control Debate*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 3, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/03/us/politics/right-and-left-las-vegas-shooting-gun-control-debate.html>; Lisa Respers France, *Gun Control Debate Enters Country Music Community: ‘Is This the Kind of World We Want to Live In?’*, CNN (Oct. 4, 2017, 6:40 PM), <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/04/entertainment/country-music-guns/index.html>; Amber Phillips, *After Las Vegas, Democrats Are Jumping Straight into the Gun-Control Debate*, WASH. POST., Oct. 2, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/10/02/after-las-vegas-democrats-are-jumping-straight-into-the-gun-control-debate/?utm_term=.e1d1d1452a98.

¹⁸ 28 C.F.R. § 16.10(k)(iii)(A)–(B).

¹⁹ American Oversight currently has approximately 11,700 page likes on Facebook, and 37,400 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Nov. 20, 2017); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Nov. 20, 2017).

senior DOJ attorney,²⁰ 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.²¹ 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.²²

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, have any questions, or foresee any problems in fully releasing the requested records, please contact Cerissa Cafasso at foia@americanoversight.org or 202.869.5246. 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,



Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight

²⁰ *DOJ Civil Division Response Noel Francisco Compliance*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>.

²¹ *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>.

²² *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, www.auditthewall.org.