



May 20, 2019

**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL**

USAID FOIA Office  
Bureau for Management  
Office of Management Services  
Information and Records Division  
Room 2.07C - RRB  
Washington, DC 20523-2701  
[foia@usaid.gov](mailto:foia@usaid.gov)

**Re: Freedom of Information Act Request**

Dear FOIA Officer:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), American Oversight makes the following request for records.

In March 2019, during the annual meeting of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the U.S. delegation pushed a conservative agenda that aims to stop the expansion of rights for women and LGBT individuals.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the U.S. sought to undermine the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—an agenda for women’s empowerment, reached through consensus at an international forum in 1995.

American Oversight seeks records to shed light on whether and to what extent the U.S. delegation to the CSW is advancing policies that harm women’s and human rights worldwide.

**Requested Records**

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

- 1) All email communications (including email messages, email attachments, and calendar invitations) from March 1, 2019 through March 31, 2019, sent to any email address ending in .com, .net, .org, .edu, or .co, by Senior Advisor Michelle Bekkering or Senior Advisor Bethany Kozma, including any of the following search terms:

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<sup>1</sup> Colum Lynch and Robbie Gramer, *At the U.N., America Turns Back the Clock on Women’s Rights*, FOREIGN POLICY (Mar. 14, 2019, 3:40 PM), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/14/at-untied-nations-women-rights-gender-health-trump-diplomacy/>.



- a. CSW
- b. commission
- c. “Beijing Declaration”
- d. “Platform for Action”
- e. gender
- f. reproductive
- g. sex\*
- h. pro-life
- i. prolife
- j. abstinence
- k. same-sex
- l. gay
- m. transgender
- n. trans-gender
- o. LGBT\*
- p. abortion
- q. abortifacient
- r. termination
- s. pregnan\*
- t. “family planning”
- u. contraception
- v. “population control”

Please note that American Oversight is using the asterisk (\*) to designate the standard use of “wildcards” in the search for responsive records. For example, a search for “pregnan \*” would return all of the following: pregnant, pregnancy, pregnancies, etc. If your agency is unable to search for wildcards, please advise so that we may specifically include the variations that we would like searched.

- 2) All email communications (including email messages, email attachments, and calendar invitations), from March 1, 2019 through March 31, 2019, sent to the following organizations by Senior Advisor Michelle Bekkering or Senior Advisor Bethany Kozma:
  - i. March for Life, including anyone with an email address ending in @marchforlife.org;
  - ii. Live Action, including anyone with an email address ending in @liveaction.org;
  - iii. Knights of Columbus, including anyone with an email address ending in @kofc.org;
  - iv. Human Life International, including anyone with an email address ending in @hli.org;
  - v. The American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists (AAPLOG), including anyone with an email address ending in @aaplog.org;
  - vi. National Right to Life, including anyone with an email address ending in @nrlc.org;

- vii. Priests for Life, including anyone with an email address ending in @priestsforlife.org;
- viii. Pro-Life Action League, including anyone with an email address ending in @prolifeaction.org;
- ix. Republican National Coalition for Life, including anyone with an email address ending in @rnclife.org;
- x. Thomas More Society, including anyone with an email address ending in @thomasmoresociety.org;
- xi. Heritage Foundation, including anyone with an email address ending in @heritage.org;
- xii. Heritage Action for America, including anyone with an email address ending in @heritageaction.com;
- xiii. Center for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam), including anyone with an email address ending in @c-fam.org;
- xiv. Family Research Council (FRC), including anyone with an email address ending in @frc.org;
- xv. Family Research Council Action, including anyone with an email address ending in @frcaction.org;
- xvi. International Organization for the Family, including but not limited to any person communicating from an email address ending in @profam.org;
- xvii. American Family Association, including but not limited to any person communicating from an email address ending in @afa.net;
- xviii. Concerned Women for America, including but not limited to any person communicating from an email address ending in @concernedwomen.org or @cwfa.org;
- xix. Family Watch International, including but not limited to any person communicating from an email address ending in @familywatch.org;
- xx. United Families International, including but not limited to any person communicating from an email address ending in @unitedfamilies.org;
- xxi. Alliance Defending Freedom, including but not limited to any person communicating from an email address ending in @adflegal.org;
- xxii. Americans United for Life, including anyone with an email address ending in @aul.org

Please note that though American Oversight has limited its request to emails sent by these specified USAID officials in an effort to streamline the search and limit the volume of potentially responsive records to be reviewed, this request includes all complete email chains identified in the search. In other words, for example, any email sent by the specified USAID officials that either contains one of the key terms identified above, or responds to a message containing one of these key terms, should be considered responsive, and the complete email chain should be produced, displaying both sent and received messages.

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 USAID 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 are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.<sup>2</sup> **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.**<sup>3</sup>

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.**<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, agencies that have adopted the National Archives and

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<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> 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)).

<sup>4</sup> Presidential Memorandum—Managing Government Records, 76 Fed. Reg. 75,423 (Nov. 28, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/28/presidential->

**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.”<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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.”<sup>7</sup> 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.’”<sup>8</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 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.<sup>9</sup> 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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[memorandum-managing-government-records](https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf); 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>.

<sup>5</sup> FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114-185).

<sup>6</sup> *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

<sup>7</sup> *King v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223–24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphases in original).

<sup>8</sup> *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)).

<sup>9</sup> *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, USAID 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 your agency 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 your agency's implementing 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 public understanding of those operations. 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 the operations or activities of the government."<sup>10</sup> The subject matter of the requested records specifically relates to the operations or activities of the government, because it concerns communications made by State personnel in their official capacities, including communications with outside organizations and individuals who may be attempting to influence State's policies on the issue of women's and LGBTQ rights. And, as described in more detail below, American Oversight's website and social media accounts demonstrate its ability and intention to effectively convey information to the public.

This request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.<sup>11</sup> 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

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<sup>10</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 552a(4)(A)(iii).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

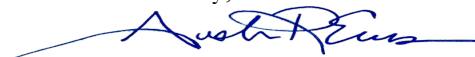
promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>12</sup> American Oversight has demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content. For example, after receiving records regarding an ethics waiver received by a senior DOJ attorney,<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

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 you 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 Khahilia Shaw at foia@americanoversight.org or 202.539.6507. 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

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<sup>12</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 12,250 page likes on Facebook and 54,200 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited May 15, 2019); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited May 15, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> *DOJ Records Relating to Solicitor General Noel Francisco's Recusal*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>.

<sup>14</sup> *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>.

<sup>15</sup> *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>.