



September 6, 2019

VIA EMAIL

Michael Marquis
Freedom of Information Officer
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building, Room 729H
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201
FOIARequest@hhs.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 your agency, 45 C.F.R. Part 5, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

A growing number of states are passing laws that require physicians to tell patients that medical abortions can be reversed by taking progesterone between mifepristone and misoprostol, the two drugs administered in a medical abortion.¹ This approach has been trumpeted by Dr. George Delgado, a medical advisor to the Abortion Pill Rescue Network, but questioned by independent experts.² For example, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecology (ACOG) has criticized claims regarding abortion reversal as “unproven” and “unethical,” and the related state legislative mandates as “dangerous to women’s health.”³

¹ Rahima Nasa, *As “Abortion Reversal” Laws Spread, Doctors and Scientists Are Pushing Back*, FRONTLINE, Aug. 27, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/as-abortion-reversal-laws-spread-doctors-and-scientists-are-pushing-back/>.

² *Id.*; Melissa Jeltsen, *Inside the Dangerous Rise of ‘Abortion Reversal’ Bills*, HUFFPOST, Aug. 1, 2019, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/abortion-reversal-bills_n_5d164c6ee4b07f6ca57cc6fc.

³ Fact Sheet, ACOG, *Facts Are Important: Medication Abortion “Reversal” Is Not Supported by Science* (Aug. 2017), <https://www.acog.org/-/media/Departments/Government-Relations-and-Outreach/FactsAreImportantMedicationAbortionReversal.pdf?dmc=1&ts=20180206T1955451745>.



American Oversight seeks to shed light on whether and to what extent abortion reversal has gained support among federal officials, and whether any action has been taken on this issue.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) produce the following records within twenty business days:

All email communications (including email messages, email attachments, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) regarding abortion reversal sent by the HHS personnel listed below:

- a. Diane Foley, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Population Affairs, and anyone acting on her behalf such as a scheduler, advisor, or assistant;
- b. Roger Severino, Director of the Office for Civil Rights, and anyone acting on his behalf such as a scheduler, advisor, or assistant;
- c. Thomas March Bell, Chief of Staff, Office for Civil Rights;
- d. Matthew Bowman, Principal Advisor to the Director, Office for Civil Rights;
- e. Justin Butterfield, Conscience and Religious Freedom Senior Advisor, Office for Civil Rights;
- f. Maya Noronha, Special Advisor, Office for Civil Rights;
- g. Louis A. Brown, Jr., former Senior Advisor for Operations, Office for Civil Rights;
- h. Daniel Balsarak, Senior Policy Advisor, Office for Civil Rights;
- i. Arina Grossu, Outreach Advisor, Office for Civil Rights;
- j. Mandi Ancalle, Policy Advisor, Office for Civil Rights;
- k. Shannon Royce, Director of the Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives, and anyone acting on her behalf such as a scheduler, advisor, or assistant;
- l. Scott Lloyd, Senior Advisor, Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives;
- m. Catherine Snow, Communications, Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives;
- n. Marie Meszaros, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Health Reform, and Advisor and Legal Counsel, Office of the General Counsel;
- o. Valerie Huber, in her former role as Chief of Staff, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health;
- p. Steven Valentine, Chief of Staff, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health;
- q. Laura Trueman, Deputy Director, Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs;
- r. Maggie Wynne, Counselor for Human Services Policy.

American Oversight believes that records containing the terms below are likely to be responsive records, and American Oversight requests that HHS, at a minimum, employ these search terms to identify responsive records:

- i. abortion /10 revers*
- ii. mifepristone /10 revers*
- iii. Mifeprex /10 revers*
- iv. "RU-486" /10 revers*
- v. abortion /10 progesterone
- vi. mifepristone /10 progesterone
- vii. Mifeprex /10 progesterone
- viii. "RU-486" /10 progesterone
- ix. "abortion pill rescue"
- x. "George Delgado"
- xi. "Dr. Delgado"

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 "revers*" would return all of the following: reverse, reversal, reversing reversed, etc. If HHS is unable to search for wildcards, please advise so that we may specifically include the variations that we would like searched. American Oversight also is using "/ 10" to designate the standard use of a "proximity" connector (in other words, a search for the surrounding phrases when they appear within ten words of each other in a document). If HHS is unable to use a proximity connector, we recommend replacing it with an AND connector.

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 provide all responsive records from January 20, 2017, to the date of the search.

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.”⁴ The public has a significant interest in actions taken by federal officials with respect to abortion reversal, and the sources they are relying when making decisions. This is particularly so given the federal government’s critical role in funding women’s health care clinics and family planning programs, with recent news reports highlighting the fact that some federal grant recipients purport to offer abortion reversal services.⁵ Records with the potential to shed light on this issue would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the federal government, including whether any high-level federal officials are promoting abortion reversal despite the lack of credible evidence supporting the procedure.⁶ 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.⁷ 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.⁸

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.⁹ Examples reflecting this commitment to the public disclosure of documents and the creation of editorial content include the posting of records related to

⁴ 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

⁵ See, e.g., Ariana Eunjung Cha, *New Federally Funded Clinics Emphasize Abstinence, Natural Family Planning*, WASH. POST, July 29, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2019/07/22/new-federally-funded-clinics-california-emphasize-abstinence-natural-family-planning/>; Sony Salzman, *HHS Awards Nearly \$1.5 Million in Teen Pregnancy Prevention Funding to Anti-Choice Organizations*, REWIRE.NEWS, July 23, 2019, <https://rewire.news/article/2019/07/23/hhs-awards-nearly-1-5-million-in-teen-pregnancy-prevention-funding-to-anti-choice-organizations/>.

⁶ See *supra* notes 2 & 3.

⁷ See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

⁸ American Oversight currently has approximately 12,200 page likes on Facebook and 54,500 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Sept. 3, 2019); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Sept. 3, 2019).

⁹ News, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

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;¹⁰ 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;¹¹ posting records regarding potential self-dealing at the Department of Housing & Urban Development and related analysis;¹² posting records and analysis relating to the federal government's efforts to sell nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia;¹³ 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.¹⁴

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

Guidance Regarding the Search & Processing of Requested Record

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 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

¹⁰ *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>.

¹¹ *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>.

¹² *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>.

¹³ *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>.

¹⁴ *Sessions' Letter Shows DOJ Acted on Trump's Authoritarian Demand to Investigate Clinton*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/sessions-letter>.

using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

- 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,¹⁷ 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.

¹⁵ 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).

¹⁶ See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016).

¹⁷ 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>.

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, 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 Christine H. Monahan at foia@americanoversight.org or (202) 788-0606. 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 that reads "Austin R. Evers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight