



April 29, 2020

**VIA EMAIL**

Chief Privacy Officer/Chief FOIA Officer  
The Privacy Office  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
245 Murray Lane SW  
Washington, DC 20528  
[foia@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:foia@hq.dhs.gov)

**Re: Expedited 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, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, and the disease it causes, COVID-19, has been declared a public health emergency at both the national and international levels.<sup>1</sup> Since late 2019, the virus has spread to dozens of countries, sickened millions of people, and resulted in more than 210,000 deaths.<sup>2</sup> This is a rapidly evolving situation that is demanding coordinated attention and action across the federal government.

American Oversight seeks records with the potential to shed light on the federal government's management of this public health emergency.

**Requested Records**

American Oversight seeks expedited review of this request for the reasons identified below and requests that your agency produce the following records as soon as practicable, and at least within twenty business days:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Summary*, CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>.

<sup>2</sup> *Coronavirus Map: Tracking the Global Outbreak*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 29, 2020, 8:56 AM), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/coronavirus-maps.html>.

<sup>3</sup> In this request, American Oversight seeks records maintained by FEMA. Because it is our understanding that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is processing all coronavirus-related records on FEMA's behalf, we are submitting this request to DHS in addition to FEMA. However, we are sending to FEMA for awareness and in the event that



1. All decision memoranda or orders, including but not limited to orders (incl. formal orders or informal instructions provided via email or memoranda) under the Defense Production Act or any other legal authorities, about the rerouting, inspecting, taking priority over, commandeering, seizing, intercepting, diverting, cancelling, or in any other way taking control or possession of equipment, whether temporarily or permanently, (including but not limited to memos justifying or summarizing these actions), that was in or on the way to the following locations:
  - i. Somerset County, New Jersey (on or around Apr. 3, 2020): order of N-95 masks, KN-95 masks, surgical masks<sup>4</sup>
  - ii. In route to Kentucky from Texas (between March 15 and April 11, 2020): four shipments of protective gear headed to Kentucky hospitals<sup>5</sup>
  - iii. Baystate Health, Springfield, Massachusetts (on or around April 17, 2020): order of three-ply face masks and N-95 respirators<sup>6</sup>
  - iv. Bellingham's St. Joseph hospital and other PeaceHealth medical facilities in Washington State, Oregon, and Alaska (on or before Apr. 7, 2020): order of test kit materials<sup>7</sup>
  - v. Texas Assn. of Community Health Centers (on or before Apr. 7, 2020): order of masks<sup>8</sup>
  - vi. Colorado (ordered by the state of Colorado, under the authority of Governor Polis) (on or around Apr. 4, 2020):<sup>9</sup> order of 500 ventilators

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FEMA regains responsibility for processing such requests, as American Oversight expects that this request would then be referred to FEMA for any outstanding processing.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Bowman, *Feds Take All Of County's 35,000 Mask Order Targeted For Health Care Workers*, FRANKLIN REPORTER & ADVOCATE, Apr. 3, 2020, [http://franklinreporter.com/feds-take-all-of-countys-35000-mask-order-targeted-for-health-care-workers/?fbclid=IwAR27on28jwsFzYXsXcA91W3LK\\_1cb1vUUFjn\\_XsDN78OL4NqXn\\_KAO8hMls](http://franklinreporter.com/feds-take-all-of-countys-35000-mask-order-targeted-for-health-care-workers/?fbclid=IwAR27on28jwsFzYXsXcA91W3LK_1cb1vUUFjn_XsDN78OL4NqXn_KAO8hMls).

<sup>5</sup> Annie Linskey, et al., *As Feds Play 'Backup,' States Take Unorthodox Steps to Compete in Cutthroat Global Market for Coronavirus Supplies*, WASH. POST (Apr. 11, 2020, 4:49 AM), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/as-feds-play-backup-states-take-unorthodox-steps-to-compete-in-cutthroat-global-market-for-coronavirus-supplies/2020/04/11/609b5d84-7a70-11ea-a130-df573469f094\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/as-feds-play-backup-states-take-unorthodox-steps-to-compete-in-cutthroat-global-market-for-coronavirus-supplies/2020/04/11/609b5d84-7a70-11ea-a130-df573469f094_story.html).

<sup>6</sup> Andrew W. Artenstein, *In Pursuit of PPE*, NEW ENGLAND J. OF MED., Apr. 17, 2020, <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2010025>.

<sup>7</sup> David Rasbach, *Feds Seize Coronavirus Test Kit Materials Bound for Bellingham Hospital and Northwest*, BELLINGHAM HERALD (Apr. 10, 2020, 11:28 AM), <https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/coronavirus/article241884351.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Noam N. Levey, *Hospitals Say Feds are Seizing Masks and Other Coronavirus Supplies Without a Word*, L.A. TIMES (Apr. 7, 2020, 2:07 PM), <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-04-07/hospitals-washington-seize-coronavirus-supplies>.

<sup>9</sup> Marianne Goodland, *Gov. Jared Polis: FEMA Took Our Ventilators Out From Under Us*, CO. POLITICS, Apr. 4, 2020, <https://www.coloradopolitics.com/coronavirus/gov-jared-polis->

- vii. Kentucky Hospital Association (between March 15 and April 11, 2020): unspecified supplies<sup>10</sup>
- viii. In route to Delaware from New York's John F. Kennedy (JFK) Airport (between April 1, and Apr. 21, 2020): order of N95 respirators and masks by Indutex USA; at least one order, shipment number 8994645378, arrived at JFK on April 6, 2020, and a second order arrived on April 19, 2020<sup>11</sup>

American Oversight believes your agency is in the best position to know the location of these records. At a minimum, a reasonable search would include the following offices:

- a. The immediate front office of DHS Acting Secretary Chad Wolf
- b. The immediate front office of DHS Acting General Counsel Chad Mizelle
- c. DHS officials serving on or as a liaison to the official White House coronavirus task force, led by Vice President Pence
- d. DHS officials serving on or as a liaison to task forces lead by Jared Kushner

Please provide all responsive records from February 15, 2020, through the date of the search.

- 2. All email communications (emails, email attachments, complete email chains, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) of specified agency officials regarding any of the following instances in which federal officials reportedly redirected supplies intended for coronavirus response:
  - i. Somerset County, New Jersey (on or around Apr. 3, 2020): order of N-95 masks, KN-95 masks, surgical masks<sup>12</sup>
  - ii. In route to Kentucky from Texas (between March 15 and April 11, 2020): four shipments of protective gear headed to Kentucky hospitals<sup>13</sup>
  - iii. Baystate Health, Springfield, Massachusetts (on or around April 17, 2020): order of three-ply face masks and N-95 respirators<sup>14</sup>

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[fema-took-our-ventilators-out-from-under-us/article\\_29f23eba-76a1-11ea-a065-f7f95e2756a1.html](https://www.fema.gov/newsroom/articles/2020-04-21-fema-took-our-ventilators-out-from-under-us/article_29f23eba-76a1-11ea-a065-f7f95e2756a1.html).

<sup>10</sup> Linskey, *supra* note 5 (“[A] deposit had already been made for supplies from China when, Colvin wrote, ‘we were told that the order was canceled at the request of the US Government.’”).

<sup>11</sup> Karl Baker, *Delaware Medical Supplier Says FEMA Seized 400,000 N95 Masks; Now He's Out Millions of Dollars*, USA TODAY (Apr. 21, 2020, 3:05 PM), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/04/21/indutex-usa-says-fema-seized-n-95-respirators-national-stockpile/2996256001/>.

<sup>12</sup> Bowman, *supra* note 4.

<sup>13</sup> Linskey, *supra* note 5.

<sup>14</sup> Artenstein, *supra* note 6.

- iv. Bellingham’s St. Joseph hospital and other PeaceHealth medical facilities in Washington State, Oregon, and Alaska (on or before Apr. 7, 2020): order of test kit materials<sup>15</sup>
- v. Texas Assn. of Community Health Centers (on or before Apr. 7, 2020): order of masks<sup>16</sup>
- vi. Colorado (ordered by the state of Colorado, under the authority of Governor Polis) (on or around Apr. 4, 2020):<sup>17</sup> order of 500 ventilators
- vii. Kentucky Hospital Association (between March 15 and April 11, 2020): unspecified supplies<sup>18</sup>
- viii. In route to Delaware from New York’s John F. Kennedy (JFK) Airport (between April 1, and Apr. 21, 2020): order of N95 respirators and masks by Indutex USA; at least one order, shipment number 8994645378, arrived at JFK on April 6, 2020, and a second order arrived on April 19, 2020<sup>19</sup>

Specified officials:

- a. The immediate front office of DHS Acting Secretary Chad Wolf
- b. The immediate front office of DHS Acting General Counsel Chad Mizelle
- c. DHS officials serving on or as a liaison to the official White House coronavirus task force, led by Vice President Pence
- d. DHS officials serving on or as a liaison to task forces lead by Jared Kushner

Please provide all responsive records from February 15, 2020, through 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

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<sup>15</sup> Rasbach, *supra* note 7.

<sup>16</sup> Levey, *supra* note 8.

<sup>17</sup> Goodland, *supra* note 9.

<sup>18</sup> Linskey, *supra* note 5 (“[A] deposit had already been made for supplies from China when, Colvin wrote, ‘we were told that the order was canceled at the request of the US Government.’”).

<sup>19</sup> Baker, *supra* note 11.

public understanding of operations or activities of the government.”<sup>20</sup> The public has a significant interest in the federal government’s response to the national shortage of equipment urgently needed to respond to pandemic.<sup>21</sup> Records with the potential to shed light on this matter would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the federal government, including clarifying federal agencies’ decision-making around how to manage the nation’s supply chain.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</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 promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Martha Mendoza & Kimberly Kruesi, *Nurses Push Back on Pressure to Work Without Right Equipment*, WASH. POST (Apr. 16, 2020, 12:22 AM), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/nurses-suspended-for-refusing-covid-19-care-without-n95-mask/2020/04/16/dc0428ce-7f99-11ea-84c2-0792d8591911\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/nurses-suspended-for-refusing-covid-19-care-without-n95-mask/2020/04/16/dc0428ce-7f99-11ea-84c2-0792d8591911_story.html); Martin Kaste, *Ventilator Shortages Loom As States Ponder Rules For Rationing*, NPR (Apr. 3, 2020, 5:00 AM), <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/04/03/826082727/ventilator-shortages-loom-as-states-ponder-rules-for-rationing>.

<sup>22</sup> Toluse Olorunnipa, et al., *Governors Plead for Medical Equipment From Federal Stockpile Plagued by Shortages and Confusion*, WASH. POST (Mar. 31, 2020, 3:39 PM), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/governors-plead-for-medical-equipment-from-federal-stockpile-plagued-by-shortages-and-confusion/2020/03/31/18aadda0-728d-11ea-87da-77a8136c1a6d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/governors-plead-for-medical-equipment-from-federal-stockpile-plagued-by-shortages-and-confusion/2020/03/31/18aadda0-728d-11ea-87da-77a8136c1a6d_story.html); Anita Kumar & Gavin Bade, *States Still Baffled Over How to Get Coronavirus Supplies from Trump*, POLITICO (Apr. 13, 2020, 7:02 AM), <https://www.politico.com/states/florida/story/2020/04/13/states-still-baffled-over-how-to-get-coronavirus-supplies-from-trump-1275083>.

<sup>23</sup> See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

<sup>24</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 15,500 page likes on Facebook and 102,200 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Apr. 9, 2020); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Apr. 9, 2020).

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.<sup>25</sup> 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;<sup>26</sup> 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;<sup>27</sup> posting records regarding potential self-dealing at the Department of Housing & Urban Development and related analysis;<sup>28</sup> posting records and analysis relating to the federal government's efforts to sell nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia;<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup>

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

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<sup>25</sup> *News*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

<sup>26</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>; *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>27</sup> *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>.

<sup>28</sup> *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>.

<sup>29</sup> *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>.

<sup>30</sup> *Sessions' Letter Shows DOJ Acted on Trump's Authoritarian Demand to Investigate Clinton*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/sessions-letter>.

## Application for Expedited Processing

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(E)(1) and your agency's regulations, 6 C.F.R. Part 5.5(e), American Oversight requests that your agency expedite the processing of this request.

I certify to be true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief that the information requested is urgently needed in order to inform the public concerning actual or alleged government activity, and American Oversight is primarily engaged in disseminating the information it received from public records requests to the public.

Recent reporting demonstrates that there is clearly an urgent need to inform the public regarding the matters that are the subject of American Oversight's FOIA request: how the federal government is responding to the nation's need for supplies, including potential interference with equipment orders by states or healthcare systems.<sup>31</sup>

First, American Oversight has requested records with the potential to shed light on the steps the administration has taken to respond to the novel coronavirus outbreak, which has resulted in a major public health emergency. Because the virus has spread rapidly, has already killed tens thousands of people in the United States,<sup>32</sup> there is plainly an urgent need to inform the public about how federal agencies are responding to the virus. While there is widespread reporting on the equipment shortages faced by healthcare providers, first responders, and essential workers,<sup>33</sup> there remains considerable confusion—even amongst governors, congresspeople, and healthcare leaders—about how to obtain needed supplies.<sup>34</sup> The widespread and exceptional media interest on coronavirus demonstrates that the public urgently needs information about the federal government's efforts and policies concerning the subject matter of this request.<sup>35</sup>

Second, factual developments have demonstrated a series of government failures to appropriately handle decisions regarding the virus, including obscure federal policies

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<sup>31</sup> Levey, *supra* note 8; Bowman, *supra* note 4; Artenstein, *supra* note 6.

<sup>32</sup> Coronavirus Map: Tracking the Global Outbreak, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 15, 2020, 6:57 PM), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/coronavirus-maps.html>.

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Mendoza & Kruesi, *supra* note 25; Kaste, *supra* note 25.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., *Outbid and Left Hanging, U.S. States Scramble for Ventilators*, REUTERS, Apr. 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2020/04/10/us/10reuters-health-coronavirus-usa-ventilators.html?searchResultPosition=14>; Olorunnipa, *supra* note 26.

<sup>35</sup> Adam Taylor et al., *Live Updates: Trump to Issue Guidelines on Easing U.S. Coronavirus Restrictions; Unemployment Claims Continue to Soar*, WASH. POST (Apr. 16, 2020, 11:20 AM EST), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/03/04/coronavirus-live-updates/>; *Coronavirus Live Updates: California Breaks Grim Record: More Than 100 Deaths Reported in One Day*, L.A. TIMES (Apr. 16, 2020, 10:38 AM), <https://www.latimes.com/california/liveblog/coronavirus-live-updates-thursday-april-2>; Ben Westcott, et al., *Live Updates: Coronavirus Cases Surpass 2 Million Globally*, CNN (Apr. 16,

leading to confusion amongst governors and hospitals over how to obtain needed materials,<sup>36</sup> as well as an effort by government officials to minimize press coverage and reduce public information<sup>37</sup> about the risks associated with the virus.

Moreover, I certify to be true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief that there is an urgent need to inform the public about decision regarding coronavirus. American Oversight's request seeks information that can shed light on your agency's policies and practices of managing the nation's supply chain of equipment needed to respond to COVID-19. State government officials and healthcare providers, urgently need information contained in the requested records to understand when, if ever, federal agencies may delay, divert, or seize equipment they have ordered.<sup>38</sup> Further, the general public needs more information about the extent of confusion or potential mismanagement of the supply-chain crisis.<sup>39</sup>

I further certify that American Oversight is primarily engaged in disseminating information to the public. 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. Similar to other organizations that have been found to satisfy the criteria necessary to qualify for expedition,<sup>40</sup> American Oversight "gathers information of potential interest to a segment of the public, uses its editorial skills to turn the raw material into a distinct work, and distributes that work to an audience."<sup>41</sup> American Oversight uses the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, and 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.<sup>42</sup> As discussed previously, American

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2020, 11:43 AM) <https://www.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-04-02-20-intl/index.html>.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g. Kumar & Bade, *supra* note 26; Linskey, *supra* note 5; Artenstein, *supra* note 6.

<sup>37</sup> Rebecca Ballhaus & Stephanie Armour, *Health Chief's Early Missteps Set Back Coronavirus Response*, WALL ST. J. (Apr. 22, 2020, 12:44 PM), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/health-chiefs-early-missteps-set-back-coronavirus-response-11587570514>; Brianna Ehley, *Trump's Team Shifts Tone from Preventing Coronavirus to Containing It*, POLITICO (Mar. 2, 2020, 7:52 PM), <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/02/trump-coronavirus-pence-119051>; Brett Samuels & Peter Sullivan, *Trump Downplays Need for Widespread Testing Before Reopening Economy*, THE HILL (Apr. 9, 2020, 7:55 PM), <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/492129-trump-downplays-need-for-widespread-testing-before-reopening-economy>.

<sup>38</sup> Linskey, *supra* note 5.

<sup>39</sup> Olorunnipa, *supra* note 26.

<sup>40</sup> See *ACLU v. U.S. Dep't of Justice*, 321 F. Supp. 2d 24, 30–31 (D.D.C. 2004); *EPIC v. Dep't of Defense*, 241 F. Supp. 2d 5, 15 (D.D.C. 2003).

<sup>41</sup> *ACLU*, 321 F. Supp. 2d at 29 n.5 (quoting *EPIC*, 241 F. Supp. 2d at 11).

<sup>42</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 15,500 page likes on Facebook and 102,200 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK,



Oversight has demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content.<sup>43</sup>

Accordingly, American Oversight's request satisfies the criteria for expedition.

### **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.
- 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.<sup>44</sup> It is not adequate to rely on policies and procedures that require officials to move such information to official systems within a certain

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<https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Apr. 14, 2020); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Apr. 14, 2020).

<sup>43</sup> See generally *News*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>; see, e.g., *DOJ Civil Division Response Noel Francisco Compliance*, 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>; *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>; *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>; *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>; *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>; *Sessions' Letter Shows DOJ Acted On Trump's Authoritarian Demand to Investigate Clinton*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/sessions-letter>.

<sup>44</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).

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.<sup>45</sup>

- 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,<sup>46</sup> 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

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<sup>45</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).

<sup>46</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-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>.

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 Megan Field at [foia@americanoversight.org](mailto:foia@americanoversight.org) or 202.897.2465. 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