



March 29, 2021

**VIA ONLINE PORTAL**

Public Records Custodian  
Missouri Department of Agriculture  
1616 Missouri Boulevard  
Jefferson City, MO 65109  
Via Online Portal

**Re: Sunshine Law Request**

Dear Custodian of Records:

Pursuant to the Missouri Sunshine Law, Mo. Rev. Stat. §§ 610.010 et seq., American Oversight makes the following request for records.

On February 23, 2021, the Missouri State Senate passed legislation extending legal liability protections to businesses against lawsuits alleging culpability for exposing people to Covid-19.<sup>1</sup> Opponents of the bill have raised concerns over whether it protects negligent actors from accountability.<sup>2</sup> These concerns may be particularly relevant to the meat processing industry, which drew public scrutiny and federal investigation in light of outbreaks at facilities in Missouri.<sup>3</sup>

American Oversight seeks records with the potential to shed light on the topic of a proposed liability shield in Missouri, including whether or to what extent executive agency officials weighed in on this policy.

**Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that your agency produce copies of the following records within three business days:

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<sup>1</sup> Jaelyn Driscoll, *COVID-19 Liability Protection Clears Missouri Senate, Won't Take Effect Until August*, St. Louis Pub. Radio (Feb. 23, 2021, 5:14 PM),

<https://news.stpublicradio.org/government-politics-issues/2021-02-23/covid-19-liability-protection-clears-missouri-senate-wont-take-effect-until-august>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Axon et al., *'They Think Workers Are Like Dogs.' How Pork Plant Execs Sacrificed Safety for Profits*, USA Today & Midwest Ctr. for Investigative Reporting (Jan. 26, 2021, 5:33 PM),

<https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2020/11/11/coronavirus-death-pork-plants-meat-packing/6044754002/>.



All email communications (including email messages, complete email chains, email attachments, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) sent by the Department of Agriculture officials listed below, containing any of the key terms listed below.

Department of Agriculture Officials:

1. Director of Agriculture Chris Chinn
2. Deputy Director J. Chris Klenklen
3. Meat and Poultry Inspection Program Director Marin DeBauch
4. Agriculture Business Development Director Davin Althoff

Key Terms:

1. "civil liability"
2. "gross negligence"
3. "SB 51"
4. "SB51"
5. "S.B. 51"
6. "liability claim"
7. "liability immunity"
8. "liability shield"
9. "liability waiver"
10. "qualified immunity"
11. "temporary emergency standard"
12. "willful misconduct"

Please provide all responsive records from October 1, 2020, through the date the search is conducted.

In an effort to accommodate your agency and reduce the number of potentially responsive records to be processed and produced, American Oversight has limited its request to emails sent by the specified officials. To be clear, however, American Oversight still requests that complete email chains be produced, displaying both sent and received messages. This means, for example, that both a specified official's response to an email containing one of the listed key terms and the initial received message are responsive to this request and should be produced.

### **Fee Waiver Request**

In accordance with Mo. Rev. Stat. § 610.026.1(1), American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. Disclosure of the requested records is in the public interest because it 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 likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of [a] public governmental body."<sup>4</sup> The public has a significant interest in Missouri's response to the coronavirus pandemic, including recent legislation extending legal liability protections to businesses.<sup>5</sup> Records with the potential to shed

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<sup>4</sup> Mo. Rev. Stat. § 610.026.1(1).

<sup>5</sup> See *supra* notes 1 & 3.

light on this matter would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the government, including whether or to what extent executive agency officials weighed in on the extension of a liability shield. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses agencies provide to public records 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>6</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>7</sup>

American Oversight has also demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content through regular substantive analyses posted to its website.<sup>8</sup> Examples reflecting this commitment to the public disclosure of documents and the creation of editorial content include the posting of records and analysis related to the organization's investigations into misconduct and corruption in state governments;<sup>9</sup> posting records and analysis of federal and state governments' responses to the Coronavirus pandemic;<sup>10</sup> posting records received as part of American

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<sup>6</sup> Mo. Rev. Stat. § 610.026.1(1).

<sup>7</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 15,700 page likes on Facebook and 106,000 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2021); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Mar. 29, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> See generally *News*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

<sup>9</sup> See generally *State Investigations*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/states>; see, e.g., *State Government Contacts with Voting-Restriction Activists*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/state-government-contacts-with-voting-restriction-activists>; *Georgia's Voting Machines and Election Security*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/georgias-voting-machines-and-election-security>.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., *The Trump Administration's Response to Coronavirus*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-response-to-coronavirus>; *Tulsa Health Officials Initially Estimated Trump Rally Would Directly Lead to 2 to 9 Deaths*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/tulsa-health-officials-initially-estimated-trump-rally-would-directly-lead-to-2-to-9-deaths>; *Wisconsin Documents Offer Window into Early Uncertainty over COVID-19*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/wisconsin-documents-offer-window-into-early->

Oversight’s “Audit the Wall” project to gather and analyze information related to the Trump administration’s proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border, and analyses of what those records reveal;<sup>11</sup> and 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>12</sup>

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:

- 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.<sup>13</sup>
- 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

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[uncertainty-over-covid-19](https://www.americanoversight.org/in-the-documents-florida-health-department-efforts-to-suppress-release-of-coronavirus-records); *In the Documents: Florida Health Department Efforts to Suppress Release of Coronavirus Records*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/in-the-documents-florida-health-department-efforts-to-suppress-release-of-coronavirus-records>.

<sup>11</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>12</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>13</sup> Mo. Rev. Stat. § 610.010(6).

files, email accounts, or devices in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts or text messages.

- 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.<sup>14</sup> 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, 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 [records@americanoversight.org](mailto:records@americanoversight.org) or (202) 848-1320. Also, if American Oversight's

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<sup>14</sup> Mo. Rev. Stat. § 610.024.1.

request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

Sincerely,

/s/ Mehreen Rasheed  
Mehreen Rasheed  
on behalf of  
American Oversight