



October 21, 2021

**VIA EMAIL**

Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services  
Jon Ebelt, Office of Public Information  
111 North Sanders St.  
Helena, MT 59601-4520  
[JEbelt@mt.gov](mailto:JEbelt@mt.gov)

**Re: Public Records Act Request**

Dear Public Records Officer:

Pursuant to Art. II, Section 9, of the Montana Constitution, and the Montana Public Records Act, Mont. Code Ann. §§ 2-6-1001 *et seq.*, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

**Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that your office produce the following records in a timely manner:

All email communications (including emails, email attachments, complete email chains, and calendar invitations) sent by the Department of Public Health and Human Services officials specified below containing the key term “Sturgis” from August 2, 2021, through September 3, 2021.

**Department of Public Health Officials**

1. Adam Meier, Director
2. Laura Smith, Deputy Director
3. Maggie Cook-Shimanek, Acting State Medical Officer
4. Todd Harwell, Public Health and Safety Division
5. Bekki Kirsch Wehner, Communicable Disease Bureau
6. Laura Williamson, Office of Epidemiology

In an effort to accommodate the Department of Public Health and reduce the number of potentially responsive records to be processed and produced, American Oversight has limited its request to emails sent by the above listed 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 Director Meier’s email response containing the term “Sturgis,” and the initial received message, are responsive to this request and should be produced.



Please notify American Oversight of any anticipated fees or costs in excess of \$100 prior to incurring such costs or fee.

### **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. For instance, if the request seeks “communications,” please search all locations likely to contain communications, including relevant hard-copy files, correspondence files, appropriate locations on hard drives and shared drives, emails, text messages or other direct messaging systems (such as iMessage, WhatsApp, Signal, or Twitter direct messages), voicemail messages, instant messaging systems such as Lync or ICQ, and shared messages systems such as Slack.
- 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 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 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. 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.

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.

### **Conclusion**

American Oversight is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with the mission 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>1</sup>

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 Taylor Stoneman at [records@americanoversight.org](mailto:records@americanoversight.org) or (202) 848-1319.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Taylor Stoneman*  
Taylor Stoneman  
on behalf of  
American Oversight

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<sup>1</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 15,630 page likes on Facebook and 108,900 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Oct. 20, 2021); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Oct. 20, 2021).