



September 29, 2023

VIA EMAIL

Representative Mark Pless
300 N. Salisbury St., Rm. 306A1
Raleigh, NC 27603
Mark.Pless@ncleg.gov

Re: Public Records Act Request

Dear Representative Pless:

Pursuant to the North Carolina Public Records Act, as codified at North Carolina General Statutes ch. 132, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that your office produce the following records as promptly as possible:

1. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) between (a) Representative Mark Pless, Legislative Assistant Meghan Merritt, or anyone else communicating on their behalf, and (b) the external entities or individuals listed below (including, but not limited to, anyone communicating from an email address ending in the listed domains).

External Entities and Individuals:

- i. Education First North Carolina (edfirstnc@gmail.com or edfirstnc.org)
- ii. Sloan Rachmuth (sloanie32@yahoo.com)
- iii. North Carolina Family Policy Council (ncfamily.org)
- iv. North Carolina Values Coalition (ncvalues.org)
- v. Alliance Defending Freedom (adflegal.org)
- vi. Family Policy Alliance (familypolicyalliance.com)
- vii. American College of Pediatricians (acpeds.org)
- viii. American Family Association (afa.net)
- ix. Concerned Women for America (concernedwomen.org or cwfa.org)
- x. Heritage Foundation (heritage.org or heritageaction.com)
- xi. Family Research Council (frc.org or fraction.org)
- xii. America First Legal (aflegal.org or athospr.com)
- xiii. Independent Women's Forum (iwf.org)
- xiv. Eagle Forum (eagleforum.org)
- xv. American Principles Project (americanprinciplesproject.org)
- xvi. Liberty Counsel (lc.org)
- xvii. Ethics and Public Policy Center (eppc.org)
- xviii. Manhattan Institute (manhattaninstitute.org)



xix. Do No Harm (donoharmedicine.org)

Please also note that American Oversight does not seek, and that part 1 of this request specifically excludes, the initial mailing of news clips or other mass-distribution emails. However, subsequent communications responding to or forwarding such emails are responsive to this request. For example, if Representative Pless received a mass-distribution news clip from an email address ending in ncfamily.org, that initial email would not be responsive to this request. However, if Representative Pless responded to that email to another individual with his own commentary, that subsequent message would be responsive to this request and should be produced.

2. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, complete email chains, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) sent by Representative Mark Pless, Legislative Assistant Meghan Merritt, or anyone else communicating on their behalf containing any of the key terms listed below.

Key Terms:

- a. “gender transition”
- b. “gender identity”
- c. “gender dysphoria”
- d. “gender-affirming”
- e. “gender affirming”
- f. “puberty blocker”
- g. “puberty blocking”
- h. Hormone
- i. Hormonal
- j. Trans
- k. “House Bill 808”
- l. HB808
- m. “HB 808”
- n. “gender reassignment”
- o. “sex reassignment”

In an effort to accommodate your office and reduce the number of potentially responsive records to be processed and produced, American Oversight has limited request item 2 to emails sent by the specified individuals. To be clear, however, American Oversight still requests that complete email chains be produced, displaying both sent and received messages. This means that both individuals’ response to an email and the initial received message are responsive to this request and should be produced.

For both parts of this request, please provide all responsive records from January 1, 2023, through the date the search is conducted.

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.
- 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. Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Public Records Act.¹
- 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

¹ See Atty. Gen. Josh Stein, *North Carolina Open Government Guide at 22* (2019), <https://ncdoj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019-Open-Government-Guide-2.pdf> (“Emails about official business are public records even if they are sent using the personal email account of an employee or official.”).

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.com.²

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 Rachel Baron at records@americanoversight.org or (202) 897-2465.

Sincerely,

/s/ Rachel Baron

Rachel Baron
on behalf of
American Oversight

² American Oversight currently has approximately 16,000 followers on Facebook and 111,700 followers on Twitter.com. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Sept. 29, 2023); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter.com, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Sept. 29, 2023).