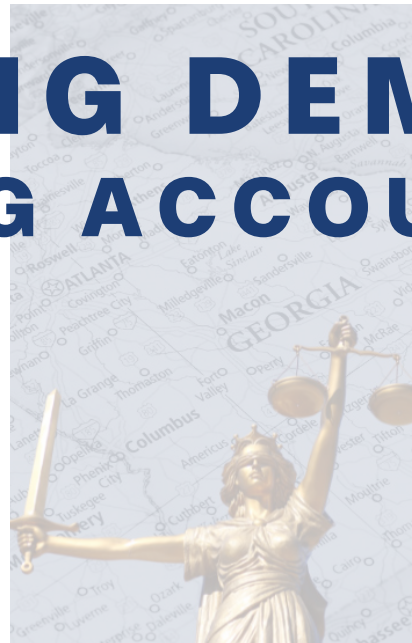


AMERICAN **OVERSIGHT**

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY



IMPACT REPORT | 2025

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

There is no way to talk about 2025 without acknowledging how challenging it was. It was the year of tariffs, DOGE cuts, immigration raids, and national guard deployments. The pace was relentless, the stakes were high, and the noise was loud. Americans faced so many attacks, on so many fronts, that the word "unprecedented" became a cliché.

But we refused to give up. American Oversight was made for this moment, and our team showed up ready to fight. We won legal challenges, exposed wrongdoing, built key partnerships, led coalitions, and helped shape the public narrative. And it mattered. It moved courts, spurred congressional action, and disrupted abuses of power that would have otherwise stayed hidden.

We are winning where it matters, and we're seeing public sentiment begin to shift. That is because of you.

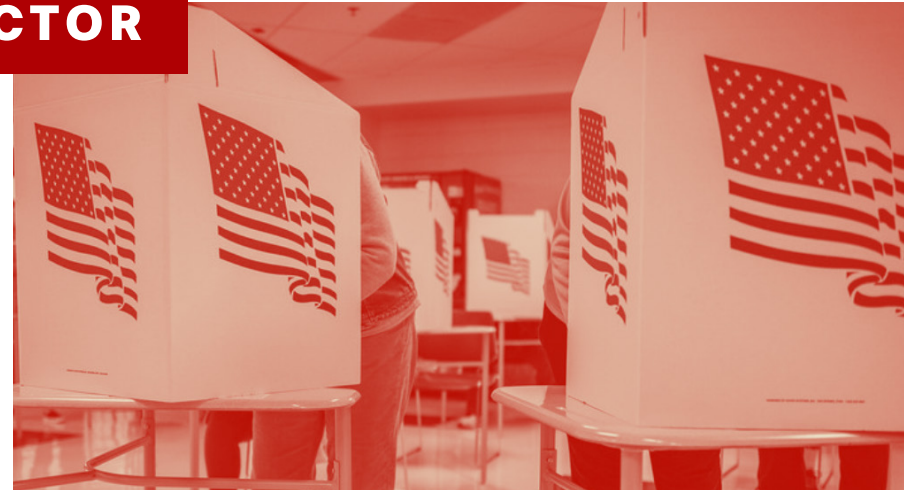
You made it possible for our investigators to uncover records the government tried to hide, for our lawyers to go to court to stop documents from being destroyed, and for us to build the first national FOIA coalition to monitor the landscape and apply sustained pressure. You did not just support an organization. You helped force facts into the open when powerful people wanted them buried.

In 2026, the stakes will rise again. The midterm elections will be among the most consequential of our lifetimes. For years, anti-democracy activists have laid the groundwork to redefine whose vote matters by restricting access to the ballot box, undermining election results, and trying to rewrite reality itself. They are organized, well-funded, and desperate to hold on to power.

As 2026 approaches, the threats will grow louder and be better resourced. So will we. Thank you for standing with us.



Chioma Chukwu
Executive Director



CONTENTS

II. AO Getting Results	4
Requiring messages to be saved and exposed	5
Revealing attacks on voting rights and securing accountability for state election officials	7
Securing victories for congressional oversight	9
Demanding release of report on Trump's mishandling of classified documents	10
Uncovering ICE and the IRS's data sharing agreement	10
III. Enhancing Impact through Partnerships	11
Uncovering threats to elections	12
Building a national early-warning system for transparency violations	12
Protecting civil society targeted by the administration	12
Representing public interest	12
Revealing the weaponization of local police for immigration enforcement	12
Empowering representatives' rights to oversight	13
Exposing misuse of taxpayer dollars	13
Working with journalists to inform the public	13
IV. By the Numbers	14
V. What's Next: 2026	16



II. Getting Results

Requiring messages to be saved and exposed

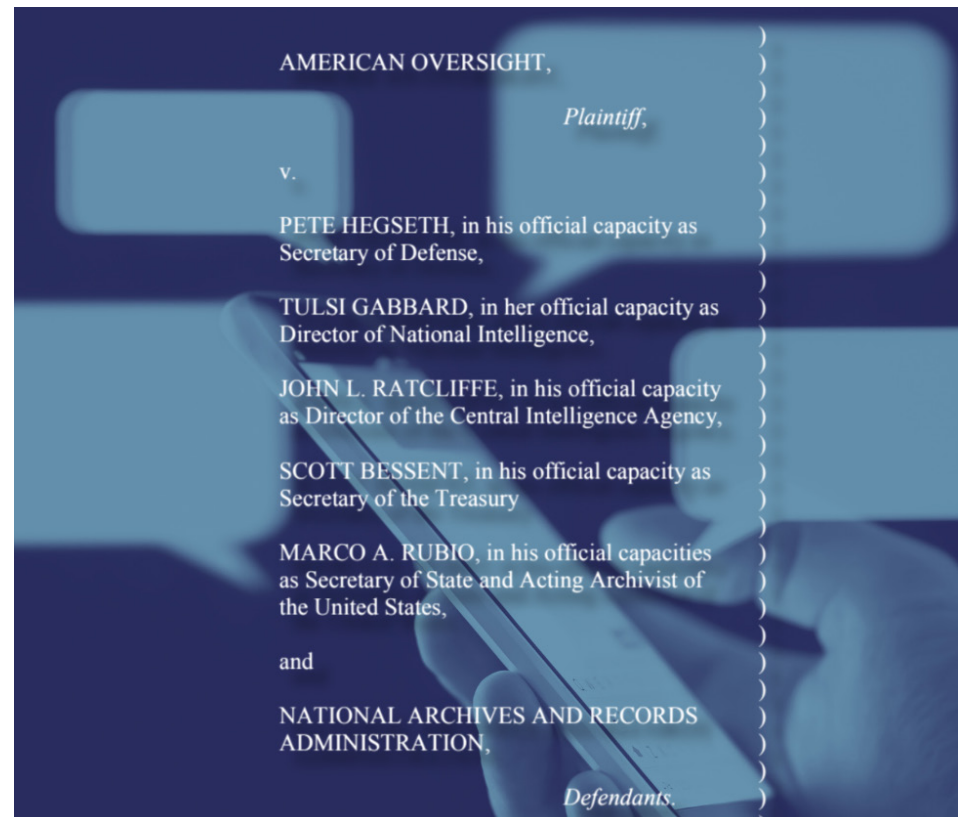
In March, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz accidentally added *The Atlantic* journalist Jeffrey Goldberg to an unsecured Signal group chat where several administration officials, including Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, discussed plans for upcoming strikes in Yemen.

We responded the day after the story broke, filing the first lawsuit against Hegseth and other officials. Our litigation prompted a court order to preserve records. It also spurred an investigation by the Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Defense, which found that Hegseth had put troops' lives in danger and that he had violated federal recordkeeping laws. **Waltz resigned following our continuous pressure for answers and accountability.**

We also **exposed gaps in the record preservation policies at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).** In the spring, we sent Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for communications of senior agency officials, only to be told that the agency "no longer maintained" text message data. This change in policy would have come at the same time DHS began receiving heightened public scrutiny for the deportation of Kilmar Ábrego García, a Maryland man who was mistakenly sent to a notorious mega-prison in El Salvador. According to public reporting and whistleblower accounts, DHS officials were engaged in significant internal discussions during this period about compliance with the Supreme Court's orders.

When we sued, DHS said it had provided us with "erroneous

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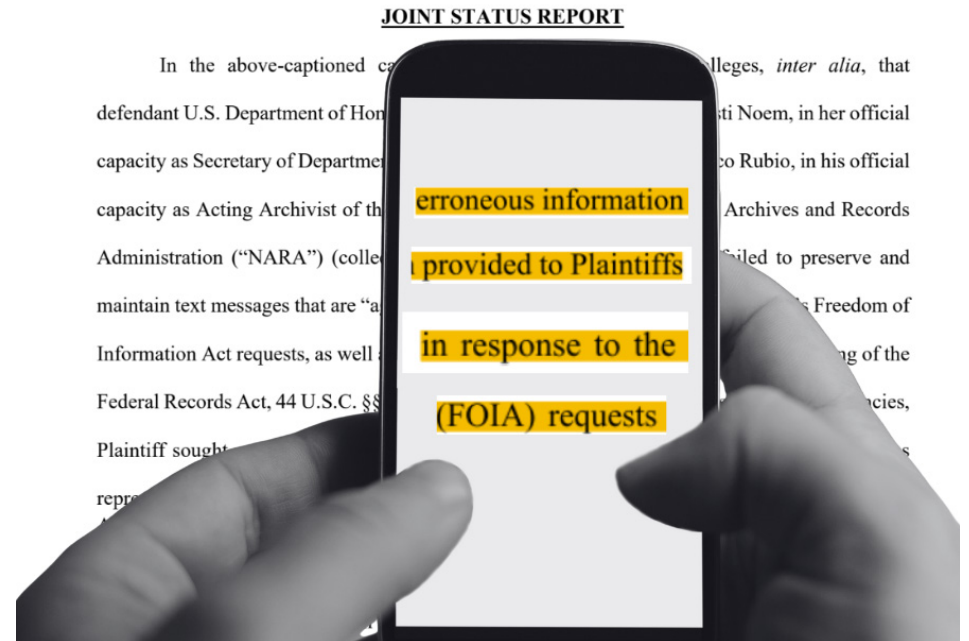
Requiring messages be saved and exposed

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information" and that it preserves texts, but it relies on individuals to take screenshots of their text messages and save them to an official, searchable location. **Because of our litigation, DHS had to affirm in sworn statements that its records are properly preserved and accessible**, and that it has started finding the records responsive to our requests. That's essential given the content of these messages, which may include details of actions that impacted the lives of families and led to wrongful deportations.

Finally, **we forced the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to adhere to records retention practices**, so that they could be held accountable for the real-world damage caused by its reckless overhaul of federal agencies and public services. Shortly after American Oversight asked a court to order DOGE to preserve certain records, DOGE unveiled a newly created records retention policy.

The policy, dated March 25, was released to American Oversight in our FOIA lawsuit against DOGE. Under the newly created policy, DOGE employees must "capture and transmit" onto their work devices records of any work-related messages received on personal devices — including through Signal.



Revealing attacks on voting rights and securing accountability for state election officials

The Trump administration dramatically expanded a DHS system into a tool to remove people from state voter rolls. We warned DHS that changing the system, which was designed for the limited purpose of determining whether immigrants were eligible for certain public benefits, into a sweeping repository of Americans' highly sensitive personal information posed serious risks to data security and threatened to wrongfully remove lawfully registered voters from the rolls.

We filed numerous public records requests and partnered with the Campaign Legal Center to sue for information about what data is being used by the system, and how it is being used. **Records we obtained revealed how states are using the system, and uncovered the Trump administration's plans to add data from drivers' licenses and passports.**

We also **forced transparency in election administration when state election officials tried to operate in secret.** In Georgia, we sued the State Election Board (SEB) when members blocked access to relevant emails, delaying disclosure for months and keeping important communications out of public view.

Our litigation forced real accountability. SEB members must now preserve and produce records of official business, whether conducted on government systems or private accounts. There are now clear rules in place for record

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Revealing attacks on voting rights and securing accountability for state election officials

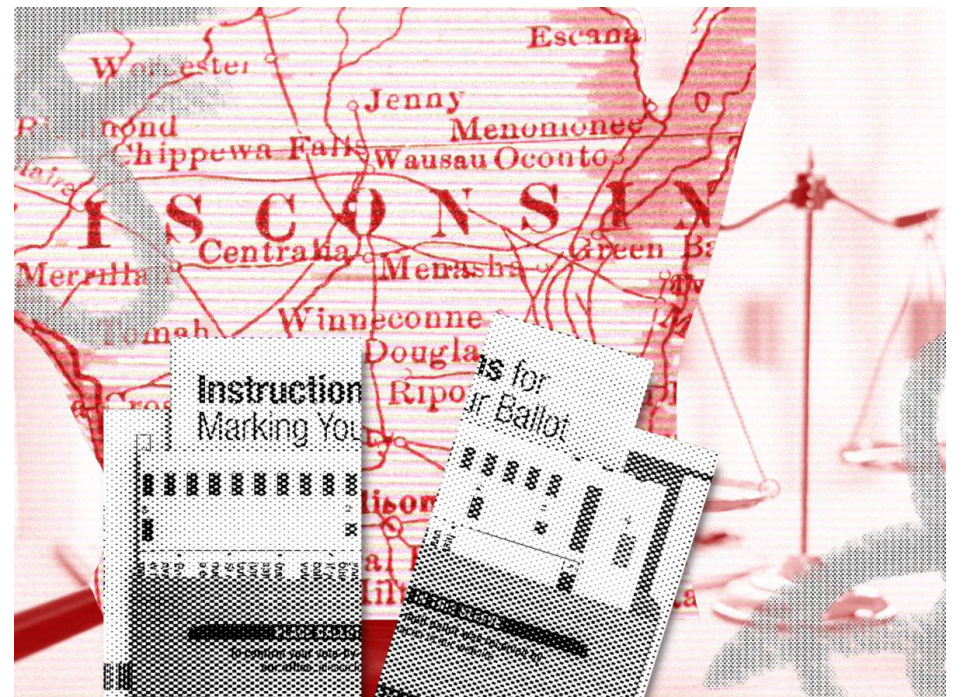
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retention and access — including communications conducted on apps like Signal — strengthening public oversight of the board's actions ahead of the 2026 elections.

In a related case, **we challenged the SEB's violation of the Georgia Open Meetings Act**. The Georgia Court of Appeals found that the board's secret decision-making violated the state's transparency laws and reinstated our lawsuit, **marking a significant win** for open government and accountability.

Finally, **we made sure bad actors faced consequences**. Former Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Michael Gableman is facing a three-year suspension of his law license because of alleged ethics violations following the 2020 election.

The Wisconsin Office of Lawyer Regulation (OLR) filed a disciplinary complaint against Gableman for his actions during the inquiry he led into the results of the 2020 presidential election. Their complaint included ten counts against Gableman, highlighting violations that were revealed through our litigation for records from the inquiry as well as his conduct during a June 2022 hearing in our litigation. The proposed three-year suspension is pending before the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

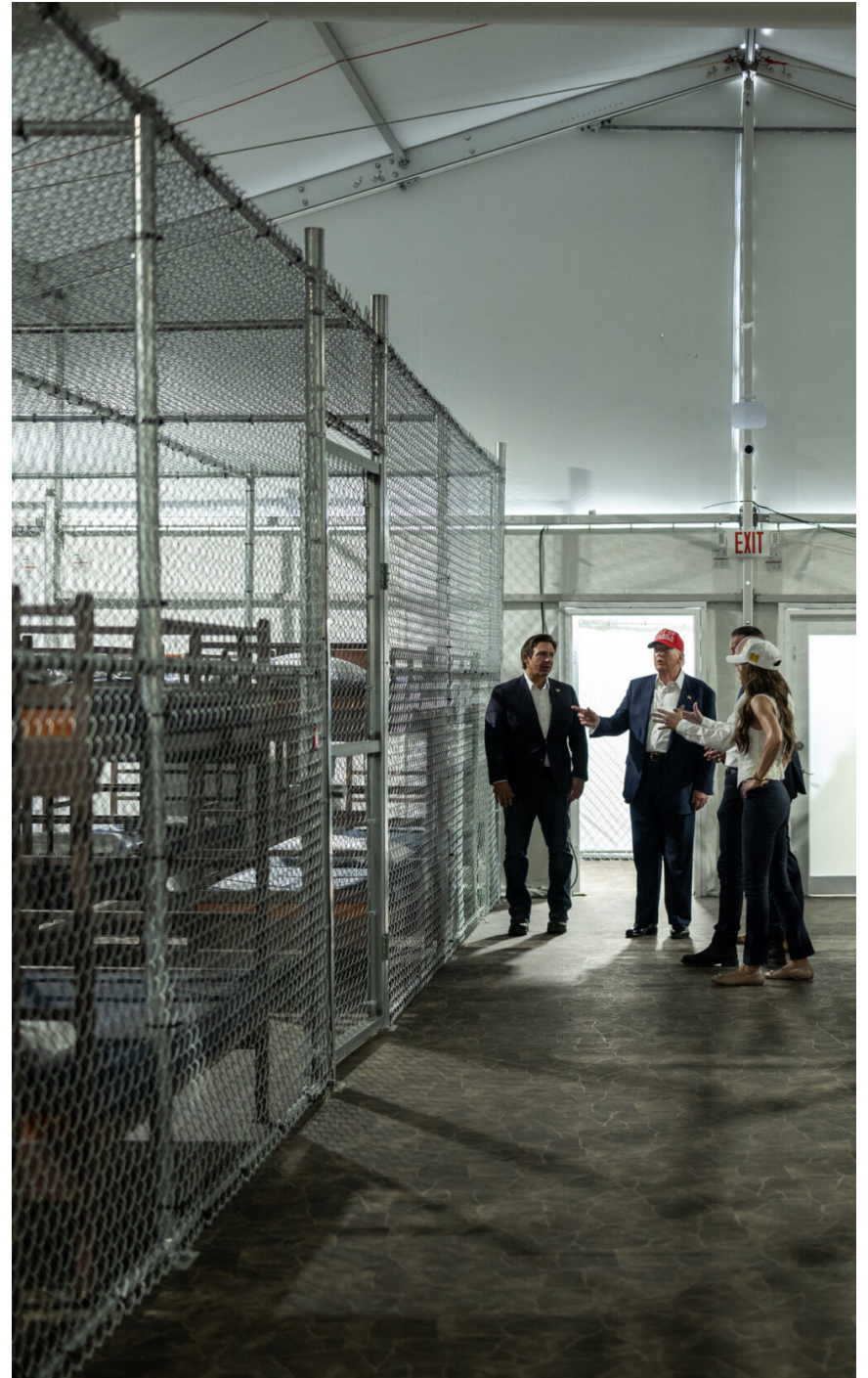


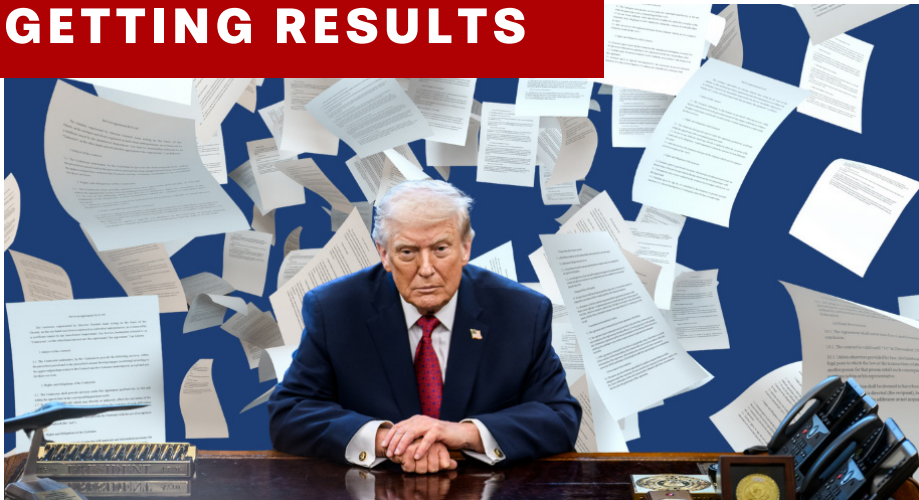
Securing victories for congressional oversight

American Oversight, alongside our partner Democracy Forward, **won a critical federal court victory for a dozen lawmakers** who were blocked from conducting unannounced inspections of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities. As immigration enforcement escalates, that access is critical to show the public what is happening inside and demand accountability from administration officials.

We also **won a years-long battle that resulted in increased accountability for Congress**. In 2017, American Oversight sued the Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of Management and Budget for records related to the Trump administration's attempt to roll back the Affordable Care Act. Among the documents produced were redacted emails from House Ways and Means Committee staff that included a template addendum asserting every email in the chains belonged to the Committee and was exempt from FOIA — even though the agencies had relied on the materials in crafting legislative strategy and advising the president.

The U.S. District Court for D.C. rejected the idea that congressional staff could avoid FOIA with that tactic, ruling that Congress cannot evade transparency by copying and pasting a catch-all disclaimer into its communications with federal agencies. **That precedent is critical today, as the Trump administration advances controversial policies** through tight coordination between the White House, agencies, and congressional leadership. Without this ruling, much of the coordination between agencies and Congress could remain hidden. Because of it, **the public has access to more information** about who is driving policy, how decisions are made, and whose interests are being served.





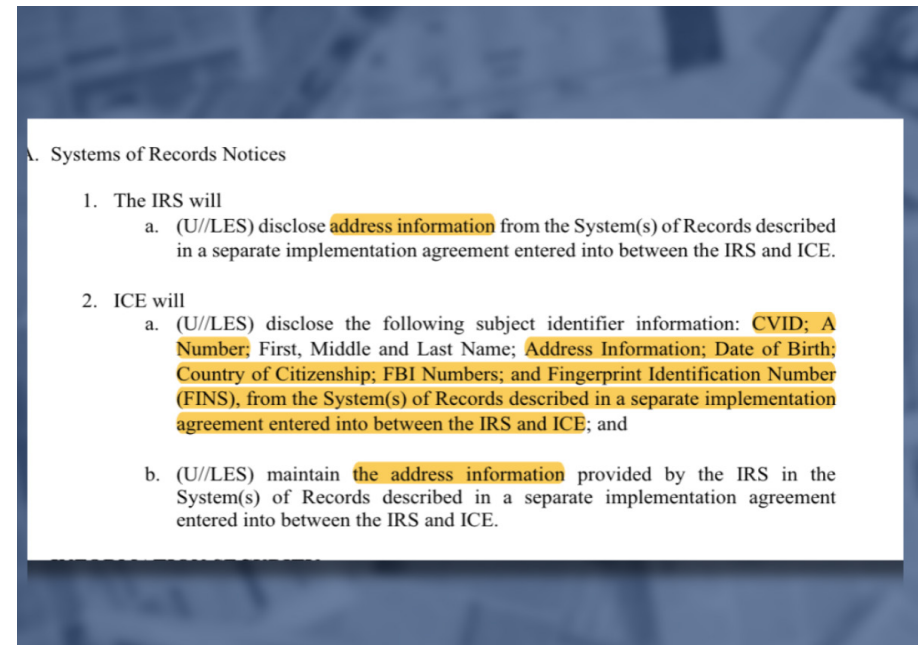
Demanding release of report on Trump's mishandling of classified documents

It's been more than two years since Trump was indicted on 37 federal charges related to his handling of classified documents at the end of his first term, but Special Counsel Jack Smith's full investigative report is still hidden from the public. **Our litigation forced action in the case** this year and drew support from members of Congress who filed an amicus brief in support of our position.

In February, we filed a motion to lift Judge Aileen Cannon's gag order prohibiting the DOJ from releasing Smith's report. Judge Cannon refused to act until a federal appeals court pushed her to rule. Judge Cannon ruled that the gag order would be lifted in February, but invited President Trump to challenge its lifting in the meantime.

Uncovering ICE and the IRS' data sharing agreement

We uncovered an agreement between ICE and the IRS to share taxpayer data, including home addresses, to locate people for immigration enforcement. Undocumented immigrants pay billions in taxes and have long relied on promises from the IRS to keep their data confidential. Later in 2025, that data-sharing arrangement was challenged in separate litigation, and **a federal judge barred the IRS from continuing the practice.**



III. Enhancing Impact through Partnerships

ENHANCING IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

We are stronger when we work together. Throughout the year, we partnered with organizations and journalists to expand their capacity. This collaboration makes it possible to protect democracy, even when attacks are coming on many fronts.

FOIA Access and Enforcement Coalition

Building a national early warning system for transparency violations

We formed the **FOIA Access and Enforcement Coalition** in response to escalating threats to transparency and accountability. **The Coalition has over 160 members** including litigators, watchdogs, journalists, and advocates. The Coalition provides a forum for members to share information, coordinate efforts, and amplify opportunities to enforce the law.



Protecting civil society targeted by the administration

We are representing Protect Democracy in a suit against the Trump administration, which demands that the administration release the lists of philanthropic and nonprofit organizations it is reportedly targeting for investigation. **The administration claims it is battling "antifa," but seems to be investigating civil society organizations with no ties to political violence.**



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Uncovering DHS' efforts to disenfranchise voters

When DHS developed a database that uses sensitive personal information to remove people from state voter rolls, we partnered with the Campaign Legal Center to sue.

Revealing the weaponization of local police for immigration enforcement

American Oversight, working with key partners, **launched a nationwide investigation** into federal-local law enforcement partnerships, uncovering how 287(g) agreements are increasing abuses of authority and escalating mass deportations.



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ENHANCING IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS



Representing public interest

American Oversight **represents the requester community on the Federal FOIA Advisory Committee (FACA)**, developing consensus recommendations for Congress and the archivist to improve FOIA administration and proactive disclosures.



Defending representatives' rights to oversight

Dozens of lawmakers were blocked from conducting unannounced inspections of ICE detention facilities. Together with Democracy Forward, we represented the plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed in the summer. In December, **the federal court ruled in our favor.**

"The administration wasn't simply breaking the law, it was trying to conceal the reality inside these facilities from the public: people in overcrowded, inhumane conditions without adequate beds, showers, or medical care. This order restores a critical check on executive power and sends a clear message that abuse cannot be hidden."

– Chioma Chukwu, Executive Director
of American Oversight, December 18, 2025



Exposing misuse of taxpayer dollars

We are **representing the Freedom of the Press Foundation in a suit** against the Department of Justice, designed to gain access to the justification for the Trump administration's acceptance of a \$400 million jet gifted by the Qatari government. Retrofitting the jet to serve as Air Force One would cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, only to have the jet transferred to Trump's private foundation once he is out of office.

Working with journalists to inform the public

We provided reporters with essential information about our work, resulting in hundreds of stories in marquee outlets. Articles covered everything from Trump's weaponization of the federal government and inhumane immigration policies to local efforts to undermine election administration.

The New York Times

AP POLITICO

MSNBC

npr

The Washington Post

IV. By the Numbers

BY THE NUMBERS

TOTAL REQUESTS

2,905



PAGES OF RECORDS

553,561

NUMBER OF LAWSUITS



PARTNERSHIPS IN

46 STATES



PARTICIPATION IN

35+ COALITIONS



FEATURED IN

~400 MEDIA CLIPS

V. What's Next

WHAT'S NEXT: 2026

Our north star this year is simple: to stop the attempts to destroy our democracy. That means disrupting unlawful schemes, breaking up networks of bad actors, and informing public opinion.

Preventing election subversion

We will expose and challenge manipulation of election systems: voter-data demands, secretive rule changes, partisan election boards, and pressure on local officials. When voters see how outcomes are engineered rather than earned, their tolerance drops fast.

Exposing economic harms

We will investigate how tariffs, contracting, and social policies reward insiders while driving up costs for ordinary people.

Defending civil society

We will use exposure and litigation to confront the political targeting of nonprofits, activists, foundations, and universities, including the Trump administration's use of sham investigations, funding threats, and regulatory harassment.

Fighting immigration enforcement overreach

We will combat the Trump administration's actions against states that do not support its unlawful immigration agenda, crackdowns on protesters, and abuses by enforcement agencies.



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