



June 6, 2024

VIA EMAIL

University of South Florida
Office of the General Counsel
4202 East Fowler Avenue, CGS 301
Tampa, FL 33620
usfpr@usf.edu

Re: Public Records Request

Dear Public Records Officer(s):

Pursuant to Article I, section 24(a), of the Florida Constitution, and Florida's public records laws, as codified at Fla. Stat. Chapter 119, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

Since April 18, 2024, more than 2,700 people have been arrested or detained on college campuses across the United States.¹ These actions by law enforcement—typically at the request of university leadership—have been driven by a rise in student-led demonstrations related to the Israel-Palestine conflict. American Oversight seeks records with the potential to shed light on state, university, and law enforcement official responses to civic expression on college campuses and related matters of free speech and academic freedom.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that your agency promptly produce the following:

All email communications (including email messages, complete email chains, calendar invitations, or any attachments thereto) sent by any of the University of South Florida officials listed below—or anyone communicating on their behalf, such as a chief of staff, assistant, or scheduler—and containing any of the following key terms, also listed below.

University of South Florida Officials:

1. Rhea Law, President
2. Paige Beles Geers, Chief of Staff
3. Prasant Mohapatra, Provost
4. Jay Stroman, Senior Vice President of Advancement & Alumni Affairs and USF Foundation CEO
5. William Weatherford, Board of Trustees Chair

¹ *Where Protestors on U.S. Campuses Have Been Arrested or Detained*, N.Y. Times (May 8, 2024, 4:18 PM), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/us/pro-palestinian-college-protests-encampments.html>.



6. Michael Griffin, Board of Trustees Vice Chair
7. Sandra Callahan, Board of Trustees Member
8. Michael Carrere, Board of Trustees Member
9. N. Rogan Donnelly, Board of Trustees Member
10. Cesar Esmeraldi, Board of Trustees Member
11. Oscar Horton, Board of Trustees Member
12. Jenifer Jasinski Schneider, Board of Trustees Member
13. Lauran Monbarren, Board of Trustees Member
14. Shilen Patel, Board of Trustees Member
15. Fredrick Piccolo, Board of Trustees Member
16. Melissa Seixas, Board of Trustees Member
17. Christopher Daniel, USF Chief of Police

Key Terms:

- a. Columbia
- b. Agitator
- c. Encampment
- d. Peaceful
- e. Palestine
- f. Palestinian
- g. Gaza
- h. Israel
- i. Hamas
- j. Divest
- k. “free speech”
- l. “freedom of speech”
- m. “first amendment”
- n. 1A
- o. “1st amendment”
- p. Shafik
- q. “Tear Gas”

In an effort to accommodate your office and reduce the number of potentially responsive records to be produced, American Oversight has limited this request to emails sent by the listed officials. To be clear, however, American Oversight requests that complete email chains be produced, displaying both sent and received messages. This means that if a listed official sent an email responding to an incoming message, both that official’s response and the initial received message are responsive to this request and should be produced.

Please provide all responsive records from April 22, 2024, 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.

American Oversight seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. In conducting your search, please understand the term “record” in its 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 includes any attachments to these records. **No category of material should be omitted from search, collection, and production.**

Please search all locations and systems likely to have responsive records regarding official business. **You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts.** Emails or texts conducting government business sent or received on the personal account of the government official constitute records for purposes of Florida’s public records laws.²

In addition, American Oversight insists that your agency use the most up-to-date technologies to search for responsive information and take steps to ensure that the most complete repositories of information are searched. American Oversight is available to work with you to craft appropriate search terms. **However, custodian searches are still required; your office 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 it is your position that a document contains non-exempt segments, but that those non-exempt segments are so dispersed throughout the document as to make segregation impossible, please state what portion of the document is non-exempt, and how the material is dispersed throughout the document. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically that 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 your office 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.

To ensure that this request is properly construed, that searches are conducted in an adequate but efficient manner, and that extraneous costs are not incurred, 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.

² *Cf. State v. City of Clearwater*, 863 So. 2d 149, 154 (Fla. 2003) (“The determining factor is the nature of the record, not its physical location.”).

Where possible, please provide responsive material in electronic format by email or in PDF or TIF 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.

Section 119.12 Notice

This document provides written notice identifying American Oversight's public records request to your agency's custodian of public records in compliance with Section 119.12(1)(b) of the Florida Statutes. Should your agency fail to comply with its obligations under Florida's public records laws, American Oversight may be prepared to file suit to enforce the provisions of Fla. Stat. Chapter 119.

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 X (formerly Twitter).³

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, have any questions, or foresee any problems in fully releasing the requested records, please contact David Kronig at records@americanoversight.org or (202) 897-3915.

Sincerely,

/s/ David Kronig
David Kronig
on behalf of
American Oversight

³ American Oversight currently has approximately 16,000 followers on Facebook and 111,400 followers on X (formerly Twitter). American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited May 29, 2024); American Oversight (@weareoversight), X (formerly Twitter), <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited May 29, 2024).