



January 22, 2025

**VIA ONLINE PORTAL**

Louisiana Department of Health  
628 N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street  
Baton Rouge, LA 70802  
Via Online Portal

**Re: Public Records Law Request**

Dear Records Custodian:

Pursuant to the Louisiana Public Records Law, La. Rev. Stat. Ann. 44:1 et seq., American Oversight makes the following request for records.

**Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) produce the following records within three business days:

All email communications (including emails, email attachments, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) sent by the officials listed below containing both a key term listed below in Column A and a key term listed in Column B.

**LDH Officials:**

- a. Surgeon General Ralph Abraham
- b. Secretary Michael Harrington
- c. Chief of Staff Bethany Blackson
- d. Emergency Preparedness Director Rosanne Prats
- e. Assistant Secretary Tonya Joiner
- f. Chief Medical Officer Dr. Juliette Saussy
- g. Senior Advisor Corlis Gremilion

**Key Terms:**

Column A	Column B
1. "avian influenza"	1. "presidential transition"
2. "avian flu"	2. "RFK"
3. "bird influenza"	3. Vance
4. "bird flu"	4. Trump
5. H5	5. Kennedy
6. H5N1	6. "HHS secretary"
7. outbreak	7. "future secretary"
8. pasteurize	8. "next secretary"



9. "raw milk"	
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To clarify, an email sent by an official that included both "bird flu" and "Trump" would be responsive. An email sent by an official that included "outbreak" but did not include any of the terms in Column B would not be responsive.

To the extent that your agency has the capacity to run Boolean searches, American Oversight believes the following search string is an example of one that would be most effective in the search for responsive records: "avian influenza" AND ("presidential transition" OR "RFK" OR "Vance" OR "Trump" OR "Kennedy" OR "HHS secretary" OR "future secretary" OR "next secretary"). American Oversight is available to work with you to construct an appropriate search, based on your search capabilities, to most efficiently identify responsive records.

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 officials listed. 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 specific individual's response to an email and the initial received message are responsive to this request and should be produced.

**Please provide all responsive records from December 1, 2024, through the date the search is conducted.**

**Fee Waiver Request**

In accordance with La. Rev. Stat. Ann. 44:32(C)(2), American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. A waiver of fees for this request is appropriate, because American Oversight's use of the requested records "will be limited to a public purpose."

This request is made solely for a public purpose. The public has a significant interest in the recent outbreak of the H5N1 Bird Flu.<sup>1</sup> Records with the potential to shed light on this matter would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the government, including how public health officials are discussing and handling the outbreak. 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.

Furthermore, this request is made for non-commercial purposes. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of

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<sup>1</sup> See Mary Kekatos, *As 1<sup>st</sup> Bird Flu Death Reported in US, What Could Happen With Virus in 2025?*, ABC NEWS (Jan. 8, 2025, 5:11 AM), <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/1st-bird-flu-death-reported-us-happen-virus/story?id=117417561>.

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 X (formerly Twitter).<sup>2</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>3</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>4</sup> posting records and analysis of federal and state governments' responses to the Coronavirus pandemic;<sup>5</sup> posting records received as part of American 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>6</sup> and the posting of records related to

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<sup>2</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 16,000 followers on Facebook and 97,700 followers on X (formerly Twitter). American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Jan. 17, 2025); American Oversight (@weareoversight), X (formerly Twitter), <https://x.com/weareoversight> (last visited Jan. 17, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> See generally *News*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

<sup>4</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>5</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-uncertainty-over-covid-19>; *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>6</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,

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>7</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:

- 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. Public business communications conducted on private email accounts and devices are public records subject to the Public Records Law.<sup>8</sup>
- 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.

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<https://www.americanoversight.org/border-wall-investigation-report-no-plans-no-funding-no-timeline-no-wall>.

<sup>7</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>8</sup> La. Atty. Gen. Op. No. 01-155.

## 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. 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 Danny Martinez at [records@americanoversight.org](mailto:records@americanoversight.org) or (202) 897-2465. Also, if American Oversight's request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Danny Martinez*  
Danny Martinez  
on behalf of  
American Oversight