



March 18, 2025

**VIA EMAIL**

Courtney Belolan  
Director of Policy and Governmental Affairs  
Maine Department of Education  
23 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333  
[courtney.belolan@maine.gov](mailto:courtney.belolan@maine.gov)

**Re: Freedom of Access Request**

Dear Public Access Officer:

Pursuant to the Maine Freedom of Access Act, Me. Rev. Stat. tit. 1, §§ 400 et seq., American Oversight makes the following request for records.

**Requested Records**

American Oversight requests that your agency produce the following records within a reasonable period of time:

**For all parts of this request, please provide all responsive records from February 17, 2025, through the date the search is conducted.**

1. All formal or informal directives or guidance issued to the Maine Department of Education by any federal agency related to any Title IX violation investigation into the Maine Department of Education (MDOE), Maine School District, and/or the University of Maine.<sup>1</sup>

Responsive records include, but are not limited to, any directives issued to MDOE by the U.S. Department of Education and/or the U.S. Department of Agriculture.<sup>2</sup>

2. Records sufficient to identify any disruption, delay, or halting of any disbursement of federal funding to MDOE, or any other state agency, as a result of the investigation described above in part 1. Responsive records include, but

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<sup>1</sup> *Office for Civil Rights Launches Title IX Violation Investigations Into Maine Department of Education and Maine School District*, U.S. Department of Education, Feb. 21, 2025, <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/office-civil-rights-launches-title-ix-violation-investigations-maine-department-of-education-and-maine-school-district>.

<sup>2</sup> See Leah Douglas, *USDA Review of University of Maine Funding Could Hit PFAS, Biofuel Research*, Reuters (Feb. 25, 2025, 3:20 PM), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/usda-review-university-maine-funding-could-hit-pfas-biofuel-research-2025-02-25/>.



are not limited to, any informal email communications, directives, and/or formal letters issued to MDOE.

### **Fee Waiver Request**

In accordance with Me. Rev. Stat. tit. 1, § 408-A(11)(B), American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. Disclosure of the requested records is in the public interest because it will likely contribute to a better understanding of relevant government procedures by the general public in a significant way. Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.

American Oversight requests a waiver of fees because disclosure of the requested information will contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations of the government.<sup>3</sup> The public has a significant interest in the recent Title IX investigation into public education agencies in Maine.<sup>4</sup> Records with the potential to shed light on this matter would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the government, including whether and to what extent federal funding for state agencies is withheld as a result of the investigation. 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.

This request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of 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>5</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>6</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

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<sup>3</sup> Me. Rev. Stat. tit. 1, § 408-A(11)(B).

<sup>4</sup> Douglas, *supra* note 2.

<sup>5</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 16,000 followers on Facebook and 95,500 followers on X (formerly Twitter). American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited March 3, 2025); American Oversight (@weareoversight), X (formerly Twitter), <https://x.com/weareoversight> (last visited March 3, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> See generally *News*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

state governments;<sup>7</sup> posting records and analysis of federal and state governments' responses to the Coronavirus pandemic;<sup>8</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>9</sup> and the posting of records related to 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>10</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:

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<sup>7</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>8</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>9</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, <https://www.americanoversight.org/border-wall-investigation-report-no-plans-no-funding-no-timeline-no-wall>.

<sup>10</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>.

- 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 X (formerly 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.

## **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 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.

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 Emma Lewis at [records@americanoversight.org](mailto:records@americanoversight.org) or (202) 919-6303.

Sincerely,

/s/ Emma Lewis

Emma Lewis  
on behalf of  
American Oversight