AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

May 7, 2025

VIA ONLINE PORTAL

City of Houston Municipal Courts Department
Public Information Office
1400 Lubbock St., Room N203
Houston, TX 77002
Via Online Portal

Re: Public Information Request

Dear Public Information Officer:

Pursuant to the Texas Public Information Act, as codified at Tex. Gov't Code ch. 552, American Oversight makes the following request for public records.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that your office promptly produce the following:

1. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, complete email chains, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) sent by any of the Houston Municipal Court officials listed below and containing both a key term from Column A and a key term from Column B.

   Houston Municipal Court Officials:
   a. Nelly Treviño, Director and Presiding Judge
   b. Gregory Prier, Deputy Director and Clerk of the Court
   c. Anyone serving as Chief Public Information Officer or Director of the Public Information Office

   Key Terms:

Column A	Column B
i. "ICE"[1]	i. record
ii. CBP	ii. request
iii. DHS	iii. information
	iv. data
	v. PIA

[1] American Oversight does not object to excluding results where "ICE" is the only key term to appear in the record and the term is not in reference to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

To clarify, an email sent by an official that included both "ICE" and "record" would be responsive. An email sent by an official that included "record" but did not include any of the terms listed 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: "ICE" AND ("record" OR "request" OR "information" OR "data"). 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 office and reduce the number of potentially responsive records to be processed and produced, American Oversight has limited this request 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 an individual's response to an email and the initial received message are 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) between any of the Houston Municipal Court officials listed above in part 1, and (b) any of the external entities listed below (including the listed domains).

   External Entities:
   a. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (cbp.dhs.gov)
   b. U.S. Department of Homeland Security (hq.dhs.gov)
   c. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ice.dhs.gov)

   Please note that American Oversight does not seek, and that 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. In other words, for example, if an official received a mass-distribution news clip email from U.S. Customs and Border Protection, that initial email would not be responsive to this request. However, if the official forwarded that email to another listed individual with their own commentary, that subsequent message would be responsive to this request and should be produced.

3. All records reflecting policies, procedures, and practices—both formal and informal—prepared by, received by, or otherwise in the possession of the Houston Municipal Court regarding responding to records requests from federal immigration enforcement officials, including, but not limited to, directives, guidance, trainings, and memoranda on sharing data or information with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration

and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and/or Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

4. Records reflecting any final legal advice or analysis (including both formal legal analyses or memoranda, as well as informal electronic communications) regarding complying with records requests from federal immigration enforcement officials, including, sharing data or information with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and/or Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

5. A complete copy (including any attachments) of all formal or informal public records requests or requests for information submitted by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and/or Customs and Border Protection (CBP). This includes, but is not limited to, any requests submitted under the Texas Public Information Act or Rule 12.

For all parts of this request, please provide all responsive records from January 20, 2025, through the date the search is conducted.

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.**

In addition, American Oversight insists that your office 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; governmental authorities may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.**

Please search all 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 conducting government business sent or received on the personal account of a governmental authority's officer or employee constitutes a record for purposes of the Texas Public Information Act.[2]

[2] Tex. Gov't Code § 552.002(a-2); *see also Adkisson v. Paxton*, 459 S.W.3d 761, 773 (Tex. App. 2015).

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 office can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

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.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with Tex. Gov't Code § 552.267(a), American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records, because such a waiver "is in the public interest because providing the copy of the information primarily benefits the general public." The requested records are directly related to the work of local officials, with the potential to shed light on policies regarding compliance with requests from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This matter is a subject of substantial public interest in Texas.[3] Accordingly, release of any responsive records may help the public understand the operations and activities of state officials and is therefore in the public interest.

Release of the requested records will primarily benefit the public.[4] As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of

[3] *See, e.g.*, Matt deGrood & Sam González Kelly, *ICE Request for Data on Houston Drivers Could Lead to More Deportations, Family Separations*, Houston Chron., April 4, 2025, https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/immigration/article/ice-records-request-20253190.php.
[4] Tex. Gov't Code § 552.267(a).

the requested records is not in American Oversight's financial interest, but is rather in the public interest. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses governmental authorities provide to public records requests publicly available. As noted, the subject of this request is a matter of public interest, and the public would benefit from an enhanced understanding of the government's activities through American Oversight's analysis and publication of these records. 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).[5]

American Oversight has also demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content through numerous substantive analyses posted to its website.[6] Examples reflecting this commitment to the public disclosure of documents and the creation of editorial content include the posting of records related to the organization's investigations into misconduct and corruption in state governments;[7] the posting of records related to the Trump Administration's contacts with Ukraine and analyses of those contacts;[8] posting records and editorial content about the federal government's response to the Coronavirus pandemic;[9] posting records received as part of American Oversight's "Audit the Wall" project to gather and analyze information related to the administration's proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border, and analyses of what those records reveal;[10] 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

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[5] American Oversight currently has approximately 16,000 followers on Facebook and 94,900 followers on X (formerly Twitter). American Oversight, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/ (last visited Apr. 24, 2025); American Oversight (@weareoversight), X (formerly Twitter), https://x.com/weareoversight (last visited Apr. 24, 2025).

[6] *News*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/blog.

[7] *State Investigations*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/states.

[8] *Trump Administration's Contacts with Ukraine*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-contacts-with-ukraine.

[9] *See generally The Trump Administration's Response to Coronavirus*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-response-to-coronavirus; *see, e.g.*, *CDC Calendars from 2018 and 2019: Pandemic-Related Briefings and Meetings*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/cdc-calendars-from-2018-and-2019-pandemic-related-briefings-and-meetings.

[10] *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.

issuing such waivers;[11] and posting records and analysis of federal officials' use of taxpayer dollars to charter private aircraft or use government planes for unofficial business.[12]

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver. If your office denies our request for a fee waiver, please notify American Oversight of any anticipated fees or costs in excess of $40 prior to incurring such costs or fees.

Conclusion

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with your office 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 Chloe Dennison at records@americanoversight.org or 202.516.7117. 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/ Chloe Dennison
Chloe Dennison
on behalf of
American Oversight

[11] *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.

[12] *See generally Swamp Airlines: Chartered Jets at Taxpayer Expense*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/swamp-airlines-private-jets-taxpayer-expense; *see, e.g.*, *New Information on Pompeo's 2017 Trips to His Home State*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/new-information-on-pompeos-2017-trips-to-his-home-state.