September 24, 2026

Delivered via Electronic Mail
Austin Evers
American Oversight
Email: foia@americanoversight.org

Re: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request No. 2026-DA-05976-F
Final Response

Dear Austin Evers:

This is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of Information Affairs' (OIA) final response to the above-referenced FOIA request, which sought:

1. The resume provided by Senior Advisor for New World Screwworm Preparedness John Bellinger to the agency in connection with determining the appropriate salary for him, or, if that is not available, the most recent resume contained within the agency's records.
2. All conflicts and ethics waivers and authorizations for John Bellinger, including authorizations pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502.
3. Records reflecting any recusal determinations made or issued for John Bellinger.
4. Copies of any SF-50 and SF-52 forms for John Bellinger reflecting any change in position or title, including when Mr. Bellinger enters or leaves a position.

Your request has been processed under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

A search for responsive records was conducted by the Office of Ethics (OE). The OE is the centralized office responsible for coordinating and implementing USDA's Ethics program throughout the Department. The OE provides ethics services to all USDA employees and advice and training about compliance with ethics laws and regulations, including the conflict of interest and impartiality rules, as well as the rules governing political activity by Federal employees. An additional search was conducted by the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM). The OHRM supports the Department's strategic goals and program objectives by ensuring the recruitment and retention of a highly skilled workforce as well as promoting a competency-based and results-oriented performance culture.

The OE advised the OIA that their search did not locate any records that respond to your FOIA request. The OHRM search identified a one-page (1) responsive record and further advised the OIA that they do not have a resume for Mr. Bellinger on file; instead, they have provided a website link that provides his background and professional information: https://www.tamus.edu/regents/bios/john-bellinger/.

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Regarding the single responsive record, the OIA considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing it and applying any relevant FOIA exemptions and has determined that certain information contained therein should be withheld pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(6) (FOIA Exemption 6). Below is an explanation of the information that has been withheld.

FOIA Exemption 6

Exemption 6 is generally referred to as the "personal privacy" exemption. It provides that the disclosure requirements of FOIA do not apply to "personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy." Application of the exemption involves balancing the public's interest in disclosure against individuals' privacy interests.

The information withheld under Exemption 6 consists of personal identifying information (PII), including a date of birth and social security number, as well as employment benefits information. This information qualifies as "similar files" because it is information in which individuals have a privacy interest. There is a substantial probability that disclosing the PII could interfere with an individual's personal privacy, up to and including, identity theft. Because there is a viable privacy interest that would be threatened by disclosure, Exemption 6 authorizes this office to withhold the information. Accordingly, we have determined that the public interest in the information's release does not outweigh the overriding privacy interests in keeping it confidential.

You may appeal this response by email at USDAFOIA@usda.gov. Your appeal must be in writing, and it must be received electronically no later than 90 calendar days from the date of this letter. The OIA will not consider appeals received after the 90 calendar-day limit. Appeals received after 5:00 p.m. EST will be considered received the next business day. The appeal letter should include the FOIA tracking number, a copy of the original request, the OIA's response to your original request, and a statement explaining the basis of your appeal. For quickest possible handling, the subject line of your email and the appeal letter should be marked "Freedom of Information Act Appeal" and reference FOIA No. 2026-DA-05976-F.

You may seek dispute resolution services from the OIA's FOIA Public Liaison, Ms. Melanie Enciso. Ms. Enciso may be contacted by telephone at (202) 720-9462, or electronically at Melanie.Enciso@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

You also have the option to seek assistance from the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS). Please visit Request OGIS Assistance | National Archives for information about how to request OGIS assistance in relation to a FOIA request.

Provisions of the FOIA allow us to recover part of the cost of processing your request. In this instance, no fees will be charged.

If you have any questions regarding the processing of this request, please contact Kyla Niedermaier-Betts electronically at kyla.niedermaier-betts@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

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For additional information regarding USDA FOIA regulations and processes, please refer to the information available online at Freedom of Information Act Division | USDA.

The OIA appreciates the opportunity to assist you with this matter.

Sincerely,

Alexis R. Graves

Alexis R. Graves
Director
Office of Information Affairs

Enclosure: Responsive Record (1 page)

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