

November 21, 2025

Ms. Arianne Perkins  
Freedom of Information Act Officer  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building, Room 729H  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Re: Request under the Freedom of Information Act

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter constitutes a request made pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552, and implementing regulations of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (“HHS”), 45 C.F.R. Part 5.

In March 2025, the Trump administration it announced it planned to cut 20,000 full-time jobs within HHS, 10,000 of which were factored to be specific targets of a reduction in force (“RIF”).<sup>1</sup> These job cuts began on April 1, 2025, and reporting announced widespread firings began at HHS federal health agencies. Then, on April 5, 2025, reporting explained many HHS employees received RIF notices about their layoff, while other HHS employees learned of their status when they arrived at work and could not access their building due to their badges being inactive.<sup>2</sup> Some employees were placed on administrative leave status without explanation or a sense of when or how their status might change.

Recently on September 15, 2025, reporting stated that the HHS employees who had been placed on administrative leave status earlier this year were still receiving compensation while in employment limbo.<sup>3</sup> Reporting estimates that HHS is spending tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars since the start of April on these employees who are on administrative leave.<sup>4</sup> Some employees were not given explanations as to why they were placed on administrative leave status, nor granted information on potential reassignments or any correspondence from the agency since being placed on leave.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Selena Simmons-Duffin, et. al., *The Trump administration restructures federal health agencies, cuts 20,000 jobs*, NPR, Mar. 27, 2025, available at <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/03/27/nx-s1-5342414/hhs-doge-rif-rfk-job-cuts>.

<sup>2</sup> Rob Stein, et. al., *'Your RIF notice is not cancelled.' Inside a chaotic week of massive layoffs at HHS*, NPR, Apr. 5, 2025, available at <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/04/05/g-s1-58312/hhs-layoffs-rif-cdc-fda-nih>.

<sup>3</sup> Katherine J. Wu, *The HHS Officials Being Paid Six Figures to Do Nothing*, VARIETY, Sep. 15, 2025, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/2025/09/nih-administrative-leave/684191/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*; Josh Nathan-Kazis, *The FDA Is 'Finished' as Firings Sweep Health Agencies. Drug Stocks Are Falling*, BARRON'S, Apr. 1, 2025, available at <https://www.barrons.com/articles/fda-hhs-firings-peter-stein-healthcare-stocks-05c129c7>.

The Center for Reproductive Rights (“Center”) seeks to better understand the decision to place career public health officials on administrative leave, the related expenditure of funds, and ways the Trump administration plans, if at all, to fill the pending 20,000 vacancies.

## **Records Requested**

Please provide all responsive records from January 20, 2025, through date of the search. As used herein, “records” means all records as defined in 22 C.F.R. § 171.1(b). Additionally, as used herein, any reference to HHS encompasses all regional offices (both current and past) as well as the central offices located in Washington, D.C. Please note that “communications” requested include, but are not limited to, e-mails, messaging platforms (including, but not limited to Signal, Slack, GChat or Google Hangouts, Lync, Skype, X (formerly Twitter) direct messages, Facebook messages, Truth Social messages, WhatsApp, Telegram, or Parler), and communications and relevant materials that may have been distributed via personal phones or devices. For ease of search, we have included e-mail addresses for individuals whose e-mail addresses are publicly available—lack of e-mail address availability should not hinder the agency’s ability to conduct searches based on individual names or keywords.

We request the following to be produced within twenty business days:

1. All communications, directions, meeting notices, meeting agendas, meeting notes, informational materials, draft legislation, draft rules, talking points, reports, disclosures, or other documents sent to, received by, or exchanged from the White House, Executive Office of the President, Office of Personnel Management, Department of Government Efficiency, or the Office of Management and Budget about selecting HHS employees for RIF, selecting HHS employees to be placed on administrative leave, drafting RIF messages, and placing HHS employees on administrative leave;
2. All communications, meeting notices, meeting agendas, meeting notes, informational materials, draft legislation, draft rules, talking points, reports, disclosures, or other documents sent to, received by, or exchanged between any HHS employee (temporary or permanent), official, appointee, or contractor to officials placed on administrative leave in the following offices:
  - a. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health (“OASH”);
  - b. Centers for Disease Control (“CDC”);
  - c. National Institute of Health (“NIH”), including but not limited to the Sexual and Gender Minority Research Office;
  - d. Food and Drug Administration (“FDA”).
3. All communications, meeting notices, meeting agendas, meeting notes, informational materials, draft legislation, draft rules, talking points, reports, disclosures, or other documents sent to, received by, or exchanged between any HHS employee (temporary or permanent), official, appointee, or contractor about replacing the officials placed on administrative leave.

The Center seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. 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 includes any attachments to these records. No category of material should be omitted from search, collection, and production.

In addition to the records requested above, the Center also requests records describing the processing of this request, including records sufficient to identify search terms used, locations and custodians searched, and any tracking sheets used to track the processing of this request. If your agency uses FOIA questionnaires or certifications completed by individual custodians or components to determine whether they possess responsive materials or to describe how they conducted searches, we also request any such records prepared in connection with the processing of this request.

Please search all records regarding agency business. You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts or text messages. Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA. It is not adequate to rely on policies and procedures that require officials to move such information to official systems within a certain period of time; the Center has a right to records contained in those files even if material has not yet been moved to official systems or if officials have, through negligence or willfulness, failed to meet their obligations.

Please note that in conducting a “reasonable search” as required by law, you must employ the most up-to-date technologies and tools available, in addition to searches by individual custodians likely to have responsive information. Recent technology may have rendered your agency’s prior FOIA practices unreasonable. In light of the government-wide requirements to manage information electronically by the end of 2016, it is no longer reasonable to rely exclusively on custodian-driven searches. Furthermore, agencies, including the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, that have adopted the National Archives and Records Agency (“NARA”) Capstone program, or similar policies, now maintain emails in a form that is reasonably likely to be more complete than individual custodians’ files. For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but your agency’s archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone.

Accordingly, the Center requests that HHS 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. The Center is available to work with you to craft appropriate search terms. However, custodian searches are still required; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.

We request that you produce all responsive materials in their entirety; however, should you determine the materials contain information which falls within the statutory exemptions provided in 5 U.S.C. § 552 or 22 C.F.R. § 171.11, we request the information be reviewed for possible discretionary disclosure. We furthermore request that all reasonably segregable portions of the exempt material be provided. We request that any deleted material be described in detail, and that you specify the statutory basis for the denial as well as your reasons for believing that the alleged statutory justification applies in each instance. Please separately state your reasons for not invoking your discretionary powers to release the requested documents in the public interest. Such statements will be helpful in deciding whether to appeal an adverse determination.

Under the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, agencies must adopt a presumption of disclosure, withholding information “only if . . . disclosure would harm an interest protected by an exemption” or “disclosure is prohibited by law.” If it is your position that any portion of the requested records is exempt from disclosure, the Center requests that you provide an index of those documents as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*.<sup>6</sup> As you are aware, a *Vaughn* index must describe each document claimed as exempt with sufficient specificity “to permit a reasoned judgment as to whether the material is actually exempt under FOIA.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the *Vaughn* index “must describe each document or portion thereof withheld, and for each withholding it must discuss the consequences of disclosing the sought-after information.”<sup>8</sup> Further, “the withholding agency must supply ‘a relatively detailed justification, specifically identifying the reasons why a particular exemption is relevant and correlating those claims with the particular part of a withheld document to which they apply.’”<sup>9</sup>

You should institute a preservation hold on information responsive to this request. The Center intends to pursue all legal avenues to enforce its right of access under FOIA, including litigation if necessary. Accordingly, your agency is on notice that litigation is reasonably foreseeable.

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, the Center 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, the Center and your agency can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

### **Waiver or Limitation of Fees**

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii), documents are required to be provided to requesters without any charge or at reduced fees “if disclosure of the information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government and is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.” We request a waiver (or, in the alternative, a reduction) of all fees because disclosure of the information would be in the public interest by increasing transparency on HHS spending millions

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<sup>6</sup> 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973), *cert. denied*, 415 U.S. 977 (1974) (mem.).

<sup>7</sup> *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979) (per curiam).

<sup>8</sup> *King v. U.S. Dep’t of Just.*, 830 F.2d 210, 223-24 (D.C. Cir. 1987).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 224.

of dollars to pay employees on administrative leave and information on how HHS plans to fill these positions.

Founded in 1992, the Center is the only global legal advocacy organization dedicated to reproductive rights, and its litigation and advocacy has played a key role in expanding access to reproductive health care around the world. The Center uses information gathered, and its analysis of information gathered, to educate the public through reports, briefing papers, fact sheets, periodicals, articles, blog posts, and other educational materials. Likewise, the Center also makes the materials gathered available on its public website and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Instagram. The Center receives hundreds of thousands of website page views monthly and publishes newsletters for public dissemination. Thus, the Center has a demonstrated commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content.

The Center does not make this request for commercial use. 45 C.F.R. § 5.54(b)(3). As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the Center does not have a commercial purpose, and the release of the information requested is not in the organization's financial interest. Accordingly, the Center qualifies for a fee waiver.

In the event that you determine you are unable to waive the fees, please provide us with prior notice if the total fees authorized will exceed \$200 so that we can discuss arrangements.

## **Conclusion**

The Center looks forward to working with your agency on this request. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

With respect to the form of production, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(3)(B), the Center requests that responsive materials be provided electronically by email or in PDF or TIF format on a USB drive. Please send any responsive material being provided and acknowledgement of receipt of this request to:

Manasi Raveendran  
c/o Julia Long  
Center for Reproductive Rights  
1600 K Street, NW, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20006  
Phone: (202) 524-5536  
Email: MRaveendran@reprorights.org

If it will accelerate release of responsive records, please also provide responsive material on a rolling basis.

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 Manasi Raveendran at (202) 524-5536. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Manasi Raveendran