

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

JUDICIAL WATCH, INC.,)	
425 Third Street, S.W., Suite 800)	
Washington, DC 20024,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	Civil Action No.
v.)	
)	
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE,)	
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.)	
Washington, DC 20530-0001,)	
)	
Defendant.)	
_____)	

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff Judicial Watch, Inc. (“Plaintiff”) brings this action against Defendant U.S. Department of Justice (“Defendant”) to compel compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552 (“FOIA”). As grounds therefor, Plaintiff alleges as follows:

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

1. The Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B) and 28 U.S.C. § 1331.
2. Venue is proper in this district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(e).

PARTIES

3. Plaintiff Judicial Watch, Inc. is a not-for-profit, educational organization incorporated under the laws of the District of Columbia and headquartered at 425 Third Street SW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20024. Plaintiff seeks to promote transparency, accountability, and integrity in government and fidelity to the rule of law. As part of its mission, Plaintiff regularly requests records from federal agencies pursuant to FOIA. Plaintiff analyzes the

responses and disseminates its findings and the requested records to the American public to inform them about “what their government is up to.”

4. Defendant U.S. Department of Justice is an agency of the United States Government. Defendant has possession, custody, and control of records to which Plaintiff seeks access. Defendant is headquartered at 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20530-0001.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

5. On December 12, 2017, Plaintiff submitted a FOIA request to Defendant by certified mail, seeking copies of:

a) Any and all records of communication, including but not limited to emails, text messages and instant chats, between DOJ officials in the Attorney General’s Office and Fusion GPS employee or contractor Nellie H. Ohr.

b) Any and all records of communications, including but not limited to emails, text messages and instant chats, between DOJ officials in the Attorney General’s Office and Fusion GPS employee or contractor Nellie H. Ohr.

6. The time frame for the requested records, as stated in the FOIA request, is January 1, 2015 to the present.

7. According to the United States Postal Service records, Plaintiff’s FOIA request was received by Defendant on December 18, 2017.

8. By letter dated December 19, 2017, Defendant acknowledged receiving Plaintiff’s FOIA request and informed Plaintiff that: “We have referred your request to the DOJ component(s) you have designated or, based on descriptive information you have provided, to the component(s) most likely to have the records.” This was the last communication Plaintiff received from Defendant in connection with Plaintiff’s FOIA request.

9. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(i), the Defendant was required to determine whether to comply with Plaintiff's request within (20) working days after its receipt of the request and to notify Plaintiff immediately of its determination, the records thereof, and the right to appeal any adverse determination. Defendant's determination was due by January 18, 2018.

10. As of the date of this Complaint, Defendant has failed to: (i) produce the requested records or demonstrate that the requested records are lawfully exempt from production; (ii) notify Plaintiff of the scope of any responsive records Defendant intends to produce or withhold and the reasons for any withholdings; or (iii) inform Plaintiff that it may appeal any adequately specific, adverse determination.

COUNT I
(Violation of FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552)

11. Plaintiff realleges paragraphs 1 through 10 as if fully stated herein.

12. Plaintiff is being irreparably harmed by Defendant's violation of FOIA, and Plaintiff will continue to be irreparably harmed unless Defendant is compelled to comply with FOIA.

13. To trigger FOIA's administrative exhaustion requirement, Defendant was required to determine whether to comply with Plaintiff's request within the time limits set by FOIA. Accordingly, Defendant's determination was due on or about January 18, 2018. By this date, Defendant was obligated to: (i) gather and review the requested documents; (ii) determine and communicate to Plaintiff the scope of any responsive records Defendant intended to produce or withhold and the reasons for any withholdings; and (iii) inform Plaintiff that it may appeal any adequately specific, adverse determination. *See, e.g., Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington v. Federal Election Commission*, 711 F.3d 180, 188-89 (D.C. Cir. 2013).

14. Because Defendant failed to determine whether to comply with Plaintiff's request within the time required by FOIA, Plaintiff is deemed to have exhausted its administrative appeal remedies. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(C)(i).

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that the Court: (1) order Defendant to conduct a search for any and all records responsive to Plaintiff's FOIA request and demonstrate that it employed search methods reasonably likely to lead to the discovery of records responsive to Plaintiff's FOIA request; (2) order Defendant to produce, by a date certain, any and all non-exempt records responsive to Plaintiff's FOIA request and a *Vaughn* index of any responsive records withheld under claim of exemption; (3) enjoin Defendant from continuing to withhold any and all non-exempt records responsive to Plaintiff's FOIA request; (4) grant Plaintiff an award of attorneys' fees and other litigation costs reasonably incurred in this action pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(E); and (5) grant Plaintiff such other relief as the Court deems just and proper.

Dated: March 1, 2018

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Ramona R. Cotca
Ramona R. Cotca (D.C. Bar No. 501159)
JUDICIAL WATCH, INC.
425 Third Street S.W., Suite 800
Washington, DC 20024
(202) 646-5172
rcotca@judicialwatch.org
Counsel for Plaintiff