

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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JUDICIAL WATCH, INC.,	)	
	)	
<i>Plaintiff,</i>	)	
	)	
v.	)	Case No. 18-00490 (TNM)
	)	
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE,	)	
	)	
<i>Defendant.</i>	)	
_____	)	

**JOINT STATUS REPORT**

Pursuant to the Court’s minute order of February 24, 2020, Plaintiff Judicial Watch, Inc. and Defendant U.S. Department of Justice, provide the following update to the Court on the status of this matter:

1. At issue in this Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”) lawsuit is Plaintiff Judicial Watch, Inc.’s request to Defendant, the United States Department of Justice, seeking the following records from January 1, 2015 to the present:

- a) Any and all records of contact or communication, including but not limited to emails, text messages, and instant chats between former Associate Deputy Attorney General Bruce G. Ohr and any of the following individuals/entities: former British intelligence officer Christopher Steele; owner of Fusion GPS, Glenn Simpson; and any other employees or representatives of Fusion GPS.
  - b) Any and all travel requests, authorizations and expense reports for former Associate Deputy Attorney General Bruce G. Ohr.
  - c) Any and all calendar entries of former Associate Deputy Attorney General Bruce G. Ohr.
2. DOJ has completed its search and released records responsive to these requests.

3. On February 14, 2020, Defendant re-released forty-eight pages of records that had been reprocessed in light of the Special Counsel's report, dated April 18, 2019; the release of records by the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") in another matter pending before this Court, *Judicial Watch v. DOJ*, 18-cv-2107, on August 8, 2019; and the report of the Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Justice regarding the "Crossfire Hurricane" investigation, on December 9, 2019. Processing of records is now complete in this case.

4. As part of the FBI's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, FBI has designated employees in its Records / Information Dissemination Section ("RIDS") as non-mission critical and ordered them to stay at home beginning March 17, 2020. The systems these employees work on to process FOIA requests are classified, making telework impossible. This directive applies to RIDS staff members responsible for drafting *Vaughn* indices and declarations in litigation matters. RIDS currently anticipates that its staff will return to work on March 30, 2020, although this situation remains fluid and will be regularly reassessed as circumstances change. Further details regarding FBI's decision are provided in the attached declaration of Michael G. Seidel, Assistant Section Chief of RIDS.

5. Because RIDS has been shut down, Defendant is not able to propose, or meaningfully confer with Plaintiff about, a briefing schedule for dispositive motions at this time.

6. The parties propose to meet and confer about the scope of Plaintiff's remaining legal challenges to Defendant's search and processing of records. They will provide a further status report on April 8, 2020, regarding what legal challenges Plaintiff maintains, and, if necessary and possible under the circumstances at that time, propose a briefing schedule.

Respectfully submitted,

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March 20, 2020

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**DECLARATION OF MICHAEL G. SEIDEL**

I, Michael G. Seidel, declare as follows:

(1) I am the Assistant Section Chief of the Record/Information Dissemination Section (RIDS), Information Management Division (IMD), in Winchester, Virginia and, in the absence of RIDS Section Chief, David M. Hardy, I serve as Acting Section Chief for RIDS. I have held this position since June 26, 2016. I joined the FBI in September 2011, and prior to my current position, I was the Unit Chief, RIDS Litigation Support Unit from November 2012 to June 2016; and an Assistant General Counsel, FBI Office of General Counsel, Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”) Litigation Unit, from September 2011 to November 2012. In those capacities, I had management oversight or agency counsel responsibility for FBI FOIA and Privacy Act (“PA”) litigation cases nationwide. Prior to my joining the FBI, I served as a Senior Attorney, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (“DEA”) from September 2006 to September 2011, where among myriad legal responsibilities, I advised on FOIA/PA matters and served as agency counsel representing the DEA in FOIA/PA suits nationwide. I also served as a U.S. Army Judge Advocate General’s Corps Officer in various assignments from 1994 to September 2006 culminating in my assignment as Chief, General Litigation Branch, U.S. Army Litigation Division where I oversaw FOIA/PA litigation for the U.S. Army. I am an attorney registered in the State of Ohio and the District of Columbia.

(2) In my official capacity as the Assistant Section Chief of RIDS, I supervise approximately 245 FBI employees, supported by approximately 72 contractors, who staff a total of twelve (12) FBI Headquarters (FBIHQ) units and two (2) field operational service center units whose collective mission is to effectively plan, develop, direct, and manage responses to requests for access to FBI records and information pursuant to the FOIA as amended by the OPEN

Government Act of 2007, the OPEN FOIA Act of 2009, and the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016; the Privacy Act of 1974; Executive Order 13,526; Presidential, Attorney General, and FBI policies and procedures; judicial decisions; and Presidential and Congressional directives. The statements contained in this declaration are based upon my personal knowledge, upon information provided to me in my official capacity, and upon conclusions and determinations reached and made in accordance therewith.

(3) Due to the nature of my official duties, I am familiar with the procedures followed by the FBI in responding to requests for information from its files pursuant to the provisions of the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552 and the Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552a.

(4) On January 31, 2020, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar II declared a public health emergency for the United States to aid the nation's healthcare community in responding to COVID-19. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization publicly characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic.<sup>1</sup> On March 13, 2020, the President declared a National Emergency in an effort to address the spread of COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> Further, on March 16, 2020, the President announced new guidelines to slow the spread of the virus, to include avoiding groups of more than 10 people and closing schools in many communities.<sup>3</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Situation Summary." [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), accessed March 13, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-declaring-national-emergency-concerning-novel-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak/> (last accessed Mar. 17, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> See The President's Coronavirus Guidelines for America, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/03.16.20\\_coronavirus-guidance\\_8.5x11\\_315PM.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/03.16.20_coronavirus-guidance_8.5x11_315PM.pdf) (last accessed Mar. 17, 2020).

guidance follows recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to engage in social distancing.<sup>4</sup>

(5) The United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has been issuing guidance to address how the Federal Government can implement measures to protect its workforce and the American public. Specifically, on March 7, 2020, OPM recommended the “incorporation of telework and ‘social distancing’ in COOP [Continuity of Operations] and emergency planning [to] allow the Federal Government to continue functioning efficiently and effectively, while ensuring the health and safety of employees.”<sup>5</sup> Further, on March 15, 2020, both the Acting Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued guidance to Federal agencies in the National Capital Region (NCR) to implement maximum telework flexibilities. OMB’s guidance asked agencies “to offer maximum telework flexibilities to all current telework eligible employees, consistent with operational needs of the departments and agencies as determined by their heads.”<sup>6</sup>

(6) The FBI is implementing these guidelines to protect its employees and their communities, and to ensure that it can continue to protect the American people during this national emergency.

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Centers for Disease Control “Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers” <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html> (last accessed Mar. 17, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> United States Office of Personnel Management Memorandum “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19); Additional Guidance” (March 7, 2020), <https://www.chcoc.gov/content/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-additional-guidance> (last accessed Mar. 17, 2020). See also United States Office of Personnel Management Memorandum “Updated Guidance on Telework Flexibilities in Response to Coronavirus” (March 12, 2020), <https://www.chcoc.gov/sites/default/files/M-20-13.pdf> (last accessed Mar. 17, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum from the Acting Director of The Office of Management and Budget to the Heads of Departments and Agencies “Updated Guidance for National Capital Region on Telework Flexibilities in Response to Coronavirus” (March 15, 2020), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/M20-15-Telework-Guidance-OMB.pdf> (last accessed Mar. 17, 2020).

(7) Telework is not available for RIDS employees. The systems that they work on are located on FBI's SECRET-level classified enclave. Significantly, most FOIA searches are conducted using Sentinel and documents are processed in the FOIA Document Processing System (FDPS), both of which maintain classified and other sensitive information and are located on the SECRET enclave.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, many FOIA requests involve records that must undergo classification reviews before they can be processed for FOIA exemptions. That work necessarily must be done in the office.

(8) RIDS employees have been designated as not mission-critical and sent home as of March 17, 2020.<sup>8</sup> Only a limited number of managers are being permitted to report to the office, but no FOIA processing is occurring as of March 17, 2020. While RIDS currently anticipates that its staff will return to work on March 30, 2020, this situation remains fluid and will be regularly re-assessed as circumstances change. As of March 17, 2020, no further production of records pursuant to FOIA will be made, whether those productions are in relation to requests in litigation or at the administrative stage. This includes responses to FOIA consultation requests or referrals from other agencies to the FBI. RIDS staff members responsible for drafting *Vaughn* declarations and indexes in litigation matters have also been designated as not mission-critical and sent home.

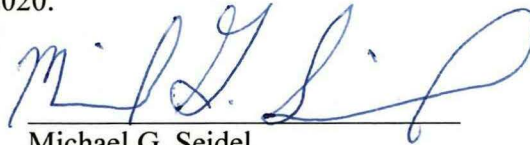
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<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in order to downgrade and move information from the SECRET enclave to an unclassified system requires running particular security protocols that can only be done on the classified enclave.

<sup>8</sup>A mission-critical position is one that's functions absolutely cannot be put on hold.

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed this 19th day of March, 2020.



Michael G. Seidel  
Assistant Section Chief  
Record/Information Dissemination Section  
Information Management Division  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Winchester, Virginia