

May 10, 2017

This is a request for records under the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 U.S.C. § 552 and the Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552a. This request should be considered under both statutes to maximize the release of records.

REQUESTER INFORMATION

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RECORDS SOUGHT

I request disclosure from the Department of Justice Executive Office of US Attorneys the following records:

1. The complete US attorney case file relating to the investigation into the death of Mikhail Lesin. As noted in a press release dated October 28, 2016, the US Attorney for the District of Columbia had worked with the DC Metro Police and the FBI investigating the death of Mikhail Lesin. ¹
2. Any and all video footage, as cited in the press release, obtained during the course of the investigation.
3. All interview transcripts, notes, exhibits, photographs, audio recordings, obtained, written and maintained during the course of the investigation into Mikhail Lesin's death.

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."

ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING REQUEST

Please produce all records with administrative markings and pagination included. Please send a memo (copy to me) to the appropriate units in your office to assure that no records related to this request are destroyed. Please advise of any destruction of records and include the date of and authority for such destruction.

FORMAT

I request that any releases stemming from this request be provided to me in digital format (soft-copy) on a compact disk or other like media.

¹ <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/investigation-death-mikhail-lesin-has-closed-manner-death-determined-accident>

FEE CATEGORY AND REQUEST FOR A FEE WAIVER

I am an investigative reporter for BuzzFeed News covering a wide-range of issues, including Guantanamo, national security, counterterrorism, civil liberties, human rights, and open government. Additionally, my reporting has been published in VICE News, The Guardian, The Wall Street Journal, The Financial Times, Salon, CBS Marketwatch, The Los Angeles Times, The Nation, Truthout, Al Jazeera English and Al Jazeera America.

I am willing to pay any reasonable expenses associated with this request, however, as the purpose of the requested disclosure is in full conformity with the statutory requirements for a waiver of fees, I formally request such a waiver. I request a waiver of all costs pursuant to 5 U.S.C. §552(a)(4)(A)(iii) (“Documents shall be furnished without any charge ... 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.”). Disclosure in this case meets the statutory criteria, and a fee waiver would fulfill Congress’s legislative intent in amending FOIA. See *Judicial Watch, Inc. v. Rossotti*, 326 F.3d 1309, 1312 (D.C. Cir. 2003) (“Congress amended FOIA to ensure that it be ‘liberally construed in favor of waivers for noncommercial requesters.’”). I incorporate by reference the explanation and attached materials in the above sections which demonstrates why the requested information is in the public interest.

Under 32 C.F.R. 1900.13(b), “Records will be furnished without charge or at a reduced rate whenever the Agency determines . . . (2) That it is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to the public understanding of the operations or activities of the United States Government and is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.”

Should my request for a fee waiver be denied, I request that I be categorized as a member of the news media for fee purposes pursuant to 32 C.F.R. 1900.02(h)(3). According to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(ii), which codified the ruling of *Nat’l Security Archive v. Dep’t of Defense*, 880 F.2d 1381 (D.C. Cir. 1989), the term “a representative of the news media” means any person or entity that gathers information of potential interest to a segment of the public, uses its editorial skills to turn the raw materials into a distinct work, and distributes that work to an audience. This is consistent with the definition provided in 32 C.F.R. 1900.02(h)(3) As the legislative history of FOIA reveals, “It is critical that the phrase ‘representative of the news media’ be broadly interpreted if the act is to work as expected. . . . In fact, any person or organization which regularly publishes or disseminates information to the public . . . should qualify for waivers as a ‘representative of the news media.’” 132 Cong. Rec. S14298 (daily ed. Sept. 30, 1986) (emphasis in original quotation); and 2) “A request by a reporter or other person affiliated with a newspaper, magazine, television or radio station, or other entity that is in the business of publishing or otherwise disseminating information

to the public qualifies under this provision.” 132 Cong. Rec. H9463 (Oct. 8, 1986) (emphasis in original quotation)). Therefore, in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act and relevant case law, I, Jason Leopold, should be considered a representative of the news media.

Should my request for a fee waiver be denied, I request that I be categorized as a member of the news media for fee purposes. According to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(ii), which codified the ruling of *Nat'l Security Archive v. Dep't of Defense*, 880 F.2d 1381 (D.C. Cir. 1989), the term “a representative of the news media” means any person or entity that gathers information of potential interest to a segment of the public, uses its editorial skills to turn the raw materials into a distinct work, and distributes that work to an audience.

As the legislative history of FOIA reveals, “It is critical that the phrase ‘representative of the news media’ be broadly interpreted if the act is to work as expected. . . . In fact, any person or organization which regularly publishes or disseminates information to the public . . . should qualify for waivers as a ‘representative of the news media.’” 132 Cong. Rec. S14298 (daily ed. Sept. 30, 1986) (emphasis in original quotation); and 2) “A request by a reporter or other person affiliated with a newspaper, magazine, television or radio station, or other entity that is in the business of publishing or otherwise disseminating information to the public qualifies under this provision.” 132 Cong. Rec. H9463 (Oct. 8, 1986) (emphasis in original quotation)). Therefore, in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act and relevant case law, I, Jason Leopold, should be considered a representative of the news media.

I have the intent and ability to disseminate this significant expansion of public understanding of government operations. The public interest in this significant expansion of public understanding of government operations far outweighs any commercial interest of my own in the requested release. Accordingly, my fee waiver request amply satisfies my request for a fee waiver. Legislative history and judicial authority emphatically support this determination. For these reasons, and based upon their extensive elaboration above, I request a full waiver of fees be granted. I will appeal any denial of my request for a waiver administratively and to the courts if necessary.