



Federal Communications Commission
Washington, DC 20554

July 21, 2026

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Conor S. Gaffney
Counsel
Protect Democracy Project
2020 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Suite #163
Washington, DC 20006
FOIA@protectdemocracy.org

Re: FOIA Control No. 2026-000623

Mr. Gaffney:

This letter is a supplemental and final response to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request (Request) to the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) in which you seek:

From November 13, 2025 until the date of search, all records referring to, concerning, or reflecting the Commission's news distortion policy or the Petition for Special Relief captioned "In the Matter of Repeal of the News Distortion Policy" and filed with the Federal Communications Commission (the "Commission") on November 13, 2025.¹

In addition, your Request seeks "... records describing the processing of this request, including records sufficient to identify search terms used and locations and custodians searched, and any tracking sheets used to track the processing of this request."²

On May 20, 2026, Commission staff contacted you to seek clarification or narrowing of your request.³ On June 5, 2026, you agreed to "exclude records of daily media digests unless those records have been forwarded, replied to, or otherwise are the basis or part of an additional communication."⁴

On July 6, 2026, the Commission provided you with an initial production of 447 pages of responsive records.⁵ In this supplemental production, we produce the balance of records located in response to your

¹ Your request has been assigned FOIA Control No. 2026-000623 (submitted May 20, 2026).

² *Id.* The Request also states that "[i]f 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." The Commission does not use such questionnaires or certifications as part of its search process.

³ Email from Kristi Thompson, Office of General Counsel, Federal Communications Commission, to Conor Gaffney, Counsel, Protect Democracy Project (May 20, 2026 18:14 EDT) (on file in FOIA Control No. 2026-000623).

⁴ Email from Conor Gaffney, Counsel, Protect Democracy Project, to Kristi Thompson, Office of General Counsel, Federal Communications Commission (June 5, 2026 12:25 EDT) (on file in FOIA Control No. 2026-000623).

⁵ Letter from Kristi Thompson, Office of General Counsel, Federal Communications Commission, to Conor Gaffney, Counsel, Protect Democracy Project (July 6, 2026) (on file in FOIA Control No. 2026-000623). In this

Request. Specifically, we produce to you an additional 528 pages of responsive records in this production. Some material on the pages produced has been redacted for one or more of the reasons discussed below. Additionally, Commission staff identified an additional 177 records that are withheld in full for one or more of the reasons discussed below.

Redaction and Withholding Under Exemption 5. Records responsive to your request were withheld or redacted under FOIA Exemption 5.⁶ Exemption 5 protects certain inter-agency and intra-agency records that are normally considered privileged in the civil discovery context.⁷

Exemption 5 encompasses a deliberative process privilege that generally covers “documents reflecting advisory opinions, recommendations and deliberations comprising part of a process by which governmental decisions and policies are formulated.”⁸ To fall within the scope of this privilege, the agency records must be both (i) predecisional, meaning generated before the adoption of the agency decision and (ii) deliberative, meaning it reflects the “give-and-take” of the decision-making process.⁹ As applied to the instant matter, email communications and attachments that included pre-decisional, deliberative communications between FCC employees were withheld or redacted pursuant to this exemption. Specifically, communications between subordinates and supervisors providing analysis and evaluating different options for agency action were redacted or withheld. Similarly, candid staff discussions weighing the merits of arguments and making recommendations were redacted or withheld. Such communications are inherently deliberative and pre-decisional in nature.

We have determined that disclosure of these records would cause specific reasonably foreseeable harms to the deliberative process and the quality of agency decisions, both of which Exemption 5 is intended to protect.¹⁰ Particularly, the release of the withheld or redacted records is likely to inhibit staff candor and frankness in providing advice or recommendations during deliberations; result in premature disclosure of proposals not yet adopted; and cause confusion regarding the ultimate rationale for agency decisions.

Exemption 5 also encompasses the attorney-client privilege. The attorney-client privilege covers “confidential communications between an attorney and [the attorney’s] client relating to a legal matter for which the client has sought professional advice.”¹¹

The Commission identified and either redacted or withheld records that contained such confidential communications. Specifically, we redacted or withheld certain records that were sent by attorneys in the FCC’s Office of General Counsel to other Commission staff in the context of answering requests for advice, providing legal analysis, or discussing work in active litigation matters. These records contained

initial production, the Commission also identified 123 records that were withheld in full pursuant to the exemptions described in the letter. *Id.*

⁶ 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(5).

⁷ *See id.*

⁸ *NLRB v. Sears Roebuck & Co.*, 421 U.S. 132, 150 (1975).

⁹ *Id.* at 151-52; *Jud. Watch, Inc. v. FDA*, 449 F.3d 141, 151 (D.C. Cir. 2006); *Coastal States Gas Corp. v. Dep’t of Energy*, 617 F.2d 854, 867 (D.C. Cir. 1980).

¹⁰ *NLRB*, 421 U.S. at 151.

¹¹ *Mead Data Cent., Inc. v. U.S. Dep’t Air Force*, 466 F.2d 242, 252 (D.C. Cir. 1977).

one or more aspects of professional advice, such as analysis of relevant case law precedents, assessment of litigation risks, development of litigation strategy, and/or assessing the soundness of legal arguments.

We have determined that it is reasonably foreseeable that disclosure would harm the attorney-client relationship, which Exemption 5 is intended to protect. Release of this information would foreseeably impair open and frank communication between the agency and its counsel in receiving or giving legal advice.

Finally, Exemption 5 also encompasses the attorney work product privilege. The privilege covers documents and memoranda prepared by an attorney in contemplation of litigation.¹² Specifically, we identified and withheld records that include attorney work product prepared in the course of still active litigation. We have determined that it is reasonably foreseeable that disclosure would harm the adversarial court process, which Exemption 5 is intended to protect. Release of this information would foreseeably reveal attorney thought processes and/or undermine litigation strategy in ongoing matters.

Redaction Under Exemption 6. Records responsive to your request were redacted under FOIA Exemption 6.¹³ Exemption 6 protects “personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.”¹⁴ Specifically, material consisting of mobile phone numbers, non-public email addresses, and some material regarding personal obligations of FCC employees (in the context of scheduling or availability) has been redacted. Balancing the public’s right to disclosure against the individual’s right to privacy, we have determined that release of this information would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. We have determined that it is reasonably foreseeable that disclosure would harm the privacy interest of the persons mentioned in these records, which Exemption 6 is intended to protect.

Redaction and Withholding Under Exemption 7(A). Records responsive to your request were withheld or redacted under Exemption 7(A), which authorizes the withholding of “records or information compiled for law enforcement purposes [the production of which] . . . could reasonably be expected to interfere with enforcement proceedings.”¹⁵ Specifically, the records in question relate to one or more FCC enforcement investigations that have not yet been resolved. These records were specifically compiled for a law enforcement purpose, and the material relates to one or more law enforcement proceeding(s) that remain(s) pending. Because the law enforcement matter(s) to which the materials relate(s) have not yet been adjudicated, we reasonably expect that premature release of the information will cause harm to the ongoing enforcement proceeding(s). Accordingly, we have determined that it is reasonably foreseeable that disclosure would harm the Commission’s or the Federal government’s law enforcement activities, which Exemption 7 is intended to protect.

We are required by both the FOIA and the Commission’s own rules to charge requesters certain fees associated with the costs of searching for, reviewing, and duplicating the sought after information.¹⁶ To calculate the appropriate fee, requesters are classified as: (1) commercial use requesters; (2) educational

¹² See *Hickman v. Taylor*, 329 U.S. 495, 509-10 (1947); *Nat’l Ass’n of Crim. Def. Laws. v. Dep’t of Just. Exec. Off. for United States Att’ys*, 844 F.3d 246, 250-51 (D.C. Cir. 2016); Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(b)(3).

¹³ 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(6).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(7)(A).

¹⁶ See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A); 47 CFR § 0.470.

requesters, non-commercial scientific organizations, or representatives of the news media; or (3) all other requesters.¹⁷

Pursuant to section 0.466(a)(5)-(7) of the Commission's rules, you have been classified as category (2), "educational requesters, non-commercial scientific organizations, or representatives of the news media."¹⁸ For such requesters, the Commission assesses charges to recover the cost of reproducing the records requested, excluding the cost of reproducing the first 100 pages. The production in response to your request did not meet these thresholds. Therefore, you will not be charged any fees.

You have requested a fee waiver pursuant to section 0.470(e) of the Commission's rules.¹⁹ Because you are not required to pay any fees in relation to your FOIA request, the Office of General Counsel, which reviews such requests, does not make a determination on your request for a fee waiver.²⁰

You may seek review of this determination by filing an application for review with the Office of General Counsel within 90 calendar days of the date of this letter.²¹ Your appeal must articulate specific grounds for review, identify factors warranting further consideration of the issue presented, and specify the relief being sought.²²

If you would like to discuss this response before filing an application for review to attempt to resolve your dispute without going through the appeals process, you may contact the Commission's FOIA Public Liaison for assistance at:

FOIA Public Liaison
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Managing Director
Performance and Program Management
45 L Street NE, Washington, DC 20554
202-418-1379
FOIA-Public-Liaison@fcc.gov

If you are unable to resolve your FOIA dispute through the Commission's FOIA Public Liaison, the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS), the Federal FOIA Ombudsman's office, offers mediation services to help resolve disputes between FOIA requesters and Federal agencies. The contact information for OGIS is:

¹⁷ 47 CFR § 0.470.

¹⁸ 47 CFR § 0.466(a)(5)-(7).

¹⁹ 47 CFR § 0.470(e).

²⁰ 47 CFR § 0.470(e)(5).

²¹ 47 CFR §§ 0.461(j), 1.7 (documents are considered filed with the Commission upon their receipt at the location designated by the Commission), and 1.115.

²² See 47 CFR §§ 0.251(j) (applications for review may be dismissed for failure to articulate specific grounds for review), 1.115(b) (an application for review must specify with particularity the questions presented for review and specify the factor(s) (from an enumerated list) warranting Commission consideration of the questions).

Office of Government Information Services
National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road-OGIS
College Park, MD 20740-6001
202-741-5770
877-684-6448
ogis@nara.gov
<https://www.archives.gov/ogis>

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Kristi Thompson, Attorney Advisor, Office of General Counsel, at kristi.thompson@fcc.gov, or the undersigned at brayden.parker@fcc.gov.

Sincerely,

**BRAYDEN
PARKER** Digitally signed by
BRAYDEN PARKER
Date: 2026.07.21
15:59:36 -04'00'

Brayden Parker
Legal Counsel
Office of the General Counsel

Enclosure(s)

cc: FCC FOIA Office