



CITIZENS FOR
RESPONSIBILITY &
ETHICS IN WASHINGTON

January 15, 2026

SUBMITTED VIA FOIA PAL

FOIA Officer
U. S. Department of State
Information Access Liaison Office, A/SKS/IAP/IAL
2201 C Street N.W., Suite B266
Washington, D.C. 20520-0000

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear FOIA Officer:

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (“CREW”) submits this request for records pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and Department of State (“DOS”) regulations.

Specifically, CREW requests records sufficient to identify any expenditures by DOS at The Mar-a-Lago Club owned by President Donald Trump between December 22, 2025 to January 3, 2026.

The above requests include records of both any expenditures made to the owners and operators of these properties and any expenditures to third parties in connection with activities taking place at these properties.

Please search for responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. We seek records of any kind, including paper records, electronic records, audiotapes, videotapes, photographs, data, and graphical material. Our request includes without limitation all correspondence, letters, emails, text messages, facsimiles, telephone messages, voice mail messages, and transcripts, notes, or minutes of any meetings, telephone conversations, or discussions. Our request also includes any attachments to emails and other records, and anyone who was cc’ed or bcc’ed on any emails.

If it is your position any portion of the requested records is exempt from disclosure, CREW requests that you provide it with an index of those documents as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973). If some portions of the requested records are properly exempt from disclosure, please disclose any reasonably segregable non-exempt portions of the requested records. See 5 U.S.C. § 552(b). If it is your position that a document contains non-exempt segments, but that those non-exempt segments are so dispersed throughout the document as to make segregation impossible, please state what portion of

the document is non-exempt, and how the material is dispersed throughout the document. *See Mead Data Central v. U.S. Dep't of the Air Force*, 566 F.2d 242, 261 (D.C. Cir. 1977).

Please be advised that CREW intends to pursue all legal remedies to enforce its rights under FOIA. Accordingly, because litigation is reasonably foreseeable, the agency should institute an agencywide preservation hold on all documents potentially responsive to this request.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A) and agency regulations, CREW requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. The subject of this request concerns the operations of the federal government, and the disclosures likely will contribute to a better understanding of relevant government procedures by CREW and the general public in a significant way. *See id.* § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii). Moreover, the request primarily and fundamentally is for non-commercial purposes. *See, e.g., McClellan Ecological v. Carlucci*, 835 F.2d 1282, 1285 (9th Cir. 1987).

In December 2025 and January 2026, Secretary of State Marco Rubio was repeatedly seen at Mar-a-Lago in connection with official business conducted by President Trump, including a December 22, 2025 announcement of "Trump Class" warships,¹ a December 28, 2025 meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at Mar-a-Lago to discuss a proposed peace plan,² a December 29, 2025 meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterating his support for another strike on Iran,³ and a January 3, 2026 news conference held in a situation room at the property announcing the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro by the United States.⁴

During President Trump's first term, the Department of State spent substantial amounts of taxpayer money at Trump-owned properties when President Trump hosted foreign officials or conducted official government business at those locations.⁵ The public record establishes that in December 2025 and January 2026, State Department leadership

¹ Kathryn Watson, Trump announces new "Trump class" of Navy battleships, *CBS*, (December 22, 2025), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-hegseth-announcement-mar-a-lago-shipbuilding/>

² Kevin Liptak, Takeaways from Trump's meeting with Zelensky in Florida, *CNN*, (December 28, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/12/28/politics/trump-zelensky-florida-meeting-takeaways>

³ Michael Arria, Trump reaffirms his support for another strike on Iran after meeting with Netanyahu, *Mondoweiss*, (December 30, 2025), <https://mondoweiss.net/2025/12/trump-reaffirms-his-support-for-another-strike-on-iran-after-meeting-with-netanyahu/>

⁴ NPR Staff, Trump says U.S. will 'run' Venezuela and sell seized oil in remarks on the strikes, *NPR*, (January 3, 2026), <https://www.npr.org/2026/01/03/g-s1-104346/trump-venezuela-maduro-press-conference>

⁵ David A. Fahrenthold, Josh Dawsey, Jonathan O'Connell & Anu Narayanswamy, Ballrooms, candles and luxury cottages: During Trump's term, millions of government and GOP dollars have flowed to his properties, *The Washington Post*, (October 27, 2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/ballrooms-candles-and-luxury-cottages-during-trumps-term-millions-of-government-and-gop-dollars-have-flowed-to-his-propertiesmar-a-lago-charged-the-government-3-apiece-for-glasses-of-water-for-trump-and-the-japanese-leader/2020/10/27/186f20a2-1469-11eb-bc10-40b25382f1be_story.html

was repeatedly at Mar-a-Lago for high-level and sensitive meetings and actions, including meeting with two heads of state regarding armed conflicts and coordinating a military attack on a foreign nation, which appears likely to have required significant Department of State resources. The requested records will illustrate how much, if any, taxpayer money was being spent during this period at a property the President owns and from which he generates personal profit, which is a matter of public interest.

CREW is a non-profit corporation, organized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. CREW is committed to protecting the public's right to be aware of the activities of government officials, to ensuring the integrity of those officials, and to highlighting and working to reduce the influence of money on politics. CREW uses a combination of research, litigation, and advocacy to advance its mission. CREW intends to analyze the information responsive to this request and to share its analysis with the public through reports, press releases, or other means. In addition, CREW will disseminate any documents it acquires from this request to the public through its website, www.citizensforethics.org. The release of information obtained through this request is not in CREW's financial interest.

CREW further requests that it not be charged search or review fees for this request pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(ii)(II) because CREW qualifies as a member of the news media. See *Nat'l Sec. Archive v. U.S. Dep't of Defense*, 880 F.2d 1381, 1386 (D.C. Cir. 1989) (holding non-profit a "representative of the news media" and broadly interpreting the term to include "any person or organization which regularly publishes or disseminates information to the public").

CREW routinely disseminates information obtained through FOIA to the public in several ways. For example, CREW's website receives over 150,000 page views every month. The website includes blogposts that report on and analyze newsworthy developments regarding government ethics, corruption, and money in politics, as well as numerous reports CREW has published to educate the public about these issues. These reports frequently rely on government records obtained through FOIA. CREW also posts the documents it obtains through FOIA on its website.

Under these circumstances, CREW satisfies fully the criteria for a fee waiver.

Conclusion

If you have any questions about this request or foresee any problems in fully releasing the requested records, please email me at rjacobs@citizensforethics.org and foia@citizensforethics.org or call me at (202) 408-5565. Also, if CREW's request for a fee waiver is denied, please contact our office immediately upon making such a determination.

Where possible, please produce records in electronic format. Please send the requested records to rjacobs@citizensforethics.org and foia@citizensforethics.org or by mail to Rebecca Jacobs, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, P.O. Box 14596, Washington, D.C. 20044.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RJ' followed by a flourish.

Rebecca Jacobs
Research Manager