

January 6, 2020

BY EMAIL: foia@hq.dhs.gov

Jimmy Wolfrey
Acting Senior Director of FOIA Operations
The Privacy Office
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane SW
STOP-0655
Washington, D.C. 20528-0655

Re: Request for Expedition of Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Mr. Wolfrey:

Pursuant to U.S. Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) regulations, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (“CREW”) requests that you authorize the expedition of a Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”) request CREW submitted today to DHS’s Chief FOIA Officer. I have attached a copy of that request.

CREW’s FOIA request seeks all documents from December 1, 2019 to the present relating to any order, directive, instruction, initiative, or protocol issued to DHS components concerning the screening, vetting, interrogation, questioning, or detention of individuals of Iranian national origin or with perceived ties to Iran appearing at U.S. ports of entry.

CREW seeks expedition because the subject matter of the request is of widespread and exceptional media interest, and the requested information involves possible questions about the government’s integrity that affect public confidence. On January 5, 2020, the news media and advocacy groups reported that “[d]ozens of Iranians and Iranian-Americans were held for hours at Washington State’s border with Canada over the weekend as [DHS] ramped up security at border ports after Iran threatened to retaliate against the United States for the strike that killed its top military leader.”¹ Specifically, “[m]ore than 60 of the travelers, many returning from work trips or vacations, were trying to come home to the United States on Saturday when agents at the Peace Arch Border Crossing in Blaine, Washington held them for additional questioning about their political views and allegiances.”² A source at U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (“CBP”) reportedly informed the Council on American-Islamic Relations that DHS “has issued a national

¹ Zolan Kanno-Youngs, Mike Baker, Mariel Padilla, [U.S. Stops Dozens of Iranian-Americans Returning From Canada](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/05/us/politics/iranian-americans-border.html), *N.Y. Times*, Jan. 5, 2020, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/05/us/politics/iranian-americans-border.html>.

² *Id.*

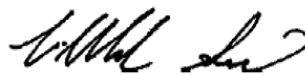
order to CBP to ‘report’ and detain anyone with Iranian heritage entering the country who is deemed potentially suspicious or ‘adversarial,’ regardless of citizenship status.”³

The requested records will shed light on any DHS directive to target individuals, including U.S. citizens, for additional screening or questioning based on their Iranian national origin. Because such a directive may itself be unlawful or could result in the widespread unlawful detention of Iranian-Americans, it raises significant questions of government integrity that plainly affect public confidence. There is also widespread and exceptional media interest in the subject, as evidenced by numerous articles that have been published in just a day’s time.⁴ The urgency of obtaining the requested records is particularly acute given the possibility of imminent armed conflict between the United States and Iran, which could result in further escalation of DHS’s screening practices with respect to individuals of Iranian origin.

CREW’s primary purpose is to inform and educate the public about the activities of government agencies and officials. To that end, CREW routinely uses statutes like the FOIA to gather information the public needs to hold government agencies and officials accountable, and disseminates that information through social media and its website, which receives tens of thousands of views every month. The request for which CREW seeks expedition will directly further CREW’s public-education mission.

I certify the above is true and correct.

Sincerely,



Nikhel Sus
Senior Counsel

³ CAIR Press Release, CAIR-WA Assisting Iranian-Americans Detained at U.S. Border, Jan. 5, 2020, available at

<https://www.cair.com/breaking-cair-wa-assisting-iranian-americans-detained-u-s-border>.

⁴ See, e.g., Zolan Kanno-Youngs, Mike Baker, Mariel Padilla, U.S. Stops Dozens of Iranian-Americans Returning From Canada, *N.Y. Times*, Jan. 5, 2020, available at

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/05/us/politics/iranian-americans-border.html>; Molly Olmstead, Iranian Americans Report Being Detained and Questioned at Canadian Border, *Slate*,

Jan. 6, 2020, available at <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/01/iranian-americans-detained-canadian-border.html>;

Lauren Gardner, Daniel Lippman, Andy Blatchford, Border stops for people of Iranian descent spark outrage, *Politico*, Jan. 5, 2020, available at

<https://www.politico.com/news/2020/01/05/reports-detaining-iranian-descent-backlash-094415>;

Iranian-Americans 'harassed' by US border officials, *BBC News*, Jan. 6, 2020, available at

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51011029>.