

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074

MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

March 14, 2016

The Honorable Loretta E. Lynch
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Madam Attorney General:

The Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) provides “authoritative legal advice to the President and all the Executive Branch agencies.”¹ In this role, OLC has historically authored numerous opinions that provide “controlling legal advice” to executive branch agencies.² At times, OLC is “asked to opine on issues of first impression that are unlikely to be resolved by the courts – a circumstance in which OLC’s advice may effectively be the final word on the controlling law.”³

The transparency of OLC opinions has been a topic of public and Congressional interest. Notably, a recent news report indicates that Central Intelligence Agency General Counsel Caroline Krass stated at an event that more frequent requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and concerns about opinions being made public “has served as a deterrent to some in terms of coming to the OLC to ask for an opinion.”⁴ Ms. Krass served for a nearly a decade in OLC, including briefly as the Acting Assistant Attorney General heading the office.

At the same event, the current head of OLC, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Karl Remón Thompson, added that OLC also provides opinions by phone or email. He stated:

There are a lot of different ways in which OLC gives advice. A very small piece of that is writing formal opinions. The vast majority of our advice is provided informally — is delivered orally or in emails. That is still authoritative. It is still binding by custom and practice in the executive branch. It’s the official view of the office. People are supposed to and do follow it.⁵

¹ Dep’t of Justice, Office of Legal Counsel, *available at* <https://www.justice.gov/olc>.

² “Best Practices for OLC Legal Advice and Written Opinions” Memorandum from Dep’t of Justice, Office of Legal Counsel (July 7, 2010), *available at* <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/olc/legacy/2010/08/26/olc-legal-advice-opinions.pdf>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Josh Gerstein, *Official: FOIA worries dampen requests for formal legal opinions*, POLITICO, Nov. 5, 2015.

⁵ *Id.*

To help the Committee better understand OLC's processes and the work that it performs, please provide the following as soon as possible, but no later than March 28, 2016:

1. Documents sufficient to show how many full-time employees work in OLC, and of those, how many are attorneys.
2. Documents sufficient to show how many requests for formal opinions OLC has received each year from 2005 to 2015.
3. Documents sufficient to show how many formal opinions OLC has issued each year from 2005 to 2015, including the number which were classified and the number which were unclassified.
4. Documents sufficient to show how many regulations requiring the Attorney General's approval OLC reviewed each year from 2005 to 2015, and of those, how many each year resulted in the issuance of a formal opinion.
5. Documents sufficient to show how many formal OLC opinions have been released publicly each year from 2005 to 2015.
6. Documents sufficient to show how many formal OLC opinions have been shared with Congress each year from 2005 to 2015, other than those shared publicly.
7. Documents sufficient to show how many FOIA requests OLC received each year from 2005 to 2015 requesting OLC opinions.
8. Documents sufficient to show how many formal OLC opinions were released under FOIA each year from 2005 to 2015.
9. Documents sufficient to show the average length of time each year from 2005 to 2015 for OLC to respond to FOIA requests.
10. Documents sufficient to show how many OLC employees have FOIA responsibilities in their job descriptions, along with the roles and responsibilities of each.
11. Documents sufficient to show the records disposition guidelines that apply to OLC for Federal Records Act purposes.
12. Documents sufficient to show whether OLC, or the Department more generally, utilizes any automatic program, such as Capstone, for Federal Records Act purposes.

The Honorable Loretta E. Lynch

March 14, 2016

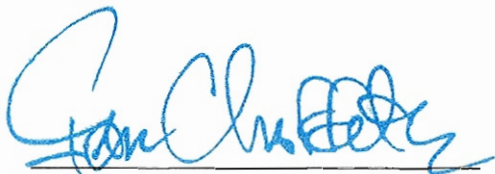
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13. Documents sufficient to show the number of requests for informal advice received and the number of requests in which OLC provided informal advice each year from 2005 to 2015, including whether the request originated within the Department, another agency, or the Executive Office of the President.
14. Information on whether Department emails containing legal guidance from OLC to the President, the Attorney General, or other agencies, whether formal or informal, are considered to be permanent federal records under the Department's applicable records schedules.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and may at "any time" investigate "any matter" as set forth in House Rule X.

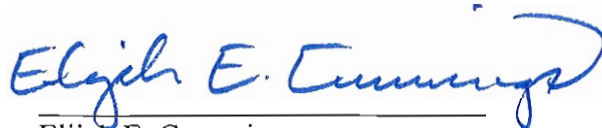
An attachment to this letter provides additional information about responding to the Committee's request. When producing documents to the Committee, please deliver production sets to the Majority staff in room 2157 of the Rayburn House Office Building and the Minority staff in room 2471 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The Committee prefers, if possible, to receive all documents in electronic format.

Should you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Tristan Leavitt of Chairman Chaffetz's staff at (202) 225-5074 or Krista Boyd of Ranking Member Cummings's staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your attention to this matter.



Jason Chaffetz
Chairman

Sincerely,



Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member

Enclosure

Responding to Committee Document Requests

1. In complying with this request, you are required to produce all responsive documents that are in your possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or your past or present agents, employees, and representatives acting on your behalf. You should also produce documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that you have a right to copy or to which you have access, as well as documents that you have placed in the temporary possession, custody, or control of any third party. Requested records, documents, data or information should not be destroyed, modified, removed, transferred or otherwise made inaccessible to the Committee.
2. In the event that any entity, organization or individual denoted in this request has been, or is also known by any other name than that herein denoted, the request shall be read also to include that alternative identification.
3. The Committee's preference is to receive documents in electronic form (i.e., CD, memory stick, or thumb drive) in lieu of paper productions.
4. Documents produced in electronic format should also be organized, identified, and indexed electronically.
5. Electronic document productions should be prepared according to the following standards:
 - (a) The production should consist of single page Tagged Image File ("TIF"), files accompanied by a Concordance-format load file, an Opticon reference file, and a file defining the fields and character lengths of the load file.
 - (b) Document numbers in the load file should match document Bates numbers and TIF file names.
 - (c) If the production is completed through a series of multiple partial productions, field names and file order in all load files should match.
 - (d) All electronic documents produced to the Committee should include the following fields of metadata specific to each document:

BEGDOC, ENDDOC, TEXT, BEGATTACH, ENDATTACH,
PAGECOUNT, CUSTODIAN, RECORDTYPE, DATE, TIME, SENTDATE,
SENTTIME, BEGINDATE, BEGINTIME, ENDDATE, ENDTIME, AUTHOR, FROM,
CC, TO, BCC, SUBJECT, TITLE, FILENAME, FILEEXT, FILESIZE,
DATECREATED, TIMECREATED, DATELASTMOD, TIMELASTMOD,
INTMSGID, INTMSGHEADER, NATIVELINK, INTFILPATH, EXCEPTION,
BEGATTACH.
6. Documents produced to the Committee should include an index describing the contents of the production. To the extent more than one CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, box or folder is produced, each CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, box or folder should contain an index describing its contents.

7. Documents produced in response to this request shall be produced together with copies of file labels, dividers or identifying markers with which they were associated when the request was served.
8. When you produce documents, you should identify the paragraph in the Committee's schedule to which the documents respond.
9. It shall not be a basis for refusal to produce documents that any other person or entity also possesses non-identical or identical copies of the same documents.
10. If any of the requested information is only reasonably available in machine-readable form (such as on a computer server, hard drive, or computer backup tape), you should consult with the Committee staff to determine the appropriate format in which to produce the information.
11. If compliance with the request cannot be made in full by the specified return date, compliance shall be made to the extent possible by that date. An explanation of why full compliance is not possible shall be provided along with any partial production.
12. In the event that a document is withheld on the basis of privilege, provide a privilege log containing the following information concerning any such document: (a) the privilege asserted; (b) the type of document; (c) the general subject matter; (d) the date, author and addressee; and (e) the relationship of the author and addressee to each other.
13. If any document responsive to this request was, but no longer is, in your possession, custody, or control, identify the document (stating its date, author, subject and recipients) and explain the circumstances under which the document ceased to be in your possession, custody, or control.
14. If a date or other descriptive detail set forth in this request referring to a document is inaccurate, but the actual date or other descriptive detail is known to you or is otherwise apparent from the context of the request, you are required to produce all documents which would be responsive as if the date or other descriptive detail were correct.
15. Unless otherwise specified, the time period covered by this request is from January 1, 2009 to the present.
16. This request is continuing in nature and applies to any newly-discovered information. Any record, document, compilation of data or information, not produced because it has not been located or discovered by the return date, shall be produced immediately upon subsequent location or discovery.
17. All documents shall be Bates-stamped sequentially and produced sequentially.
18. Two sets of documents shall be delivered, one set to the Majority Staff and one set to the Minority Staff. When documents are produced to the Committee, production sets shall be delivered to the Majority Staff in Room 2157 of the Rayburn House Office Building and the Minority Staff in Room 2471 of the Rayburn House Office Building.

19. Upon completion of the document production, you should submit a written certification, signed by you or your counsel, stating that: (1) a diligent search has been completed of all documents in your possession, custody, or control which reasonably could contain responsive documents; and (2) all documents located during the search that are responsive have been produced to the Committee.

Definitions

1. The term “document” means any written, recorded, or graphic matter of any nature whatsoever, regardless of how recorded, and whether original or copy, including, but not limited to, the following: memoranda, reports, expense reports, books, manuals, instructions, financial reports, working papers, records, notes, letters, notices, confirmations, telegrams, receipts, appraisals, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, prospectuses, inter-office and intra-office communications, electronic mail (e-mail), contracts, cables, notations of any type of conversation, telephone call, meeting or other communication, bulletins, printed matter, computer printouts, teletypes, invoices, transcripts, diaries, analyses, returns, summaries, minutes, bills, accounts, estimates, projections, comparisons, messages, correspondence, press releases, circulars, financial statements, reviews, opinions, offers, studies and investigations, questionnaires and surveys, and work sheets (and all drafts, preliminary versions, alterations, modifications, revisions, changes, and amendments of any of the foregoing, as well as any attachments or appendices thereto), and graphic or oral records or representations of any kind (including without limitation, photographs, charts, graphs, microfiche, microfilm, videotape, recordings and motion pictures), and electronic, mechanical, and electric records or representations of any kind (including, without limitation, tapes, cassettes, disks, and recordings) and other written, printed, typed, or other graphic or recorded matter of any kind or nature, however produced or reproduced, and whether preserved in writing, film, tape, disk, videotape or otherwise. A document bearing any notation not a part of the original text is to be considered a separate document. A draft or non-identical copy is a separate document within the meaning of this term.
2. The term “communication” means each manner or means of disclosure or exchange of information, regardless of means utilized, whether oral, electronic, by document or otherwise, and whether in a meeting, by telephone, facsimile, email (desktop or mobile device), text message, instant message, MMS or SMS message, regular mail, telexes, releases, or otherwise.
3. The terms “and” and “or” shall be construed broadly and either conjunctively or disjunctively to bring within the scope of this request any information which might otherwise be construed to be outside its scope. The singular includes plural number, and vice versa. The masculine includes the feminine and neuter genders.
4. The terms “person” or “persons” mean natural persons, firms, partnerships, associations, corporations, subsidiaries, divisions, departments, joint ventures, proprietorships, syndicates, or other legal, business or government entities, and all subsidiaries, affiliates, divisions, departments, branches, or other units thereof.

5. The term “identify,” when used in a question about individuals, means to provide the following information: (a) the individual's complete name and title; and (b) the individual's business address and phone number.
6. The term “referring or relating,” with respect to any given subject, means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, reflects, identifies, states, refers to, deals with or is pertinent to that subject in any manner whatsoever.
7. The term “employee” means agent, borrowed employee, casual employee, consultant, contractor, de facto employee, independent contractor, joint adventurer, loaned employee, part-time employee, permanent employee, provisional employee, subcontractor, or any other type of service provider.