



DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20223

Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act Program
Communications Center
245 Murray Lane, S.W., Building T-5
Washington, D.C. 20223

February 27, 2017

Alina M. Semo
Director
Office of Government Information Service
National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, MD 20740-6001

Re: Compliance Review of the United States Secret Service's Freedom of Information Act Program

Dear Ms. Semo:

This memorandum serves as the United States Secret Service's (Secret Service) response to the Office of Government Information Service's (OGIS) Report, regarding the results of OGIS' Compliance Assessment of USSS's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Program.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the results of OGIS's Compliance Assessment of Secret Service's FOIA Program. The Secret Service appreciates OGIS's work in planning and conducting its review and issuing OGIS's Report, "Compliance Review of United States Secret Service Freedom of Information Program."

The Secret Service concurs with each of the recommendations provided in this assessment and has been working diligently over the last 120 days to address the issues which OGIS identified during the FOIA Assessment. Secret Service is fully committed to improving the efficiency of its FOIA operations, and efforts to implement your recommendations are currently underway. We share your belief that fully implementing the recommendations will represent a significant change in the administration of this Agency's FOIA operations and will enhance our FOIA program.

We look forward to working with your office on providing the status of our continued progress of each of the recommendations

Responses to Recommendations

Finding 1: Leadership Support, Insufficient Management Controls to Reduce Backlog

Recommendation 1: Adopt management controls and continue working towards using metrics in employee performance goals.

Response: Concur. Secret Service's FOIAXpress management system is used to track the number of pages processed, which will be used as a management and quality-control oversight tool. This data is currently reported to Secret Service leadership monthly to highlight the FOIA workload. The USSS's FOIA program is currently working with the Performance Management Team with in the Office of Human Resources. New individual performance metrics are being established and will be put in place at the beginning of the next rating period.

Recommendation 2: Create a formal data-driven backlog reduction plan.

Response: Concur. USSS is in the process of creating a formal data-driven backlog reduction plan to reduce the backlog of requests by 10-percent.

Recommendation 3: Direct appeals staff to include information about mediation services offered by the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) in its final appeal response letters.

Response: Concur. The Office of Chief Counsel is going to include information about mediation services offered by OGIS in its final appeal response letters.

Recommendation 4: Continue to work with the Office of Chief Counsel (OCC) to improve the quality of initial searches.

Response: Concur. The FOIA/PA program continues to work closely with the Office of Chief Counsel to improve the quality of initial searches. The Intake Section staff typically consults OCC on an informal basis to discuss multi-series and more complex requests to ensure adequate searches on a case-by-case basis.

Recommendation 5: Update USSS Standard of Operating Procedures to reflect process for responding to first-party requests with no responsive records.

Response: Concur. USSS FOIA Standard of Operating Procedures has been updated to reflect the process for responding to first-party requests with no responsive records.

Finding 2: Investing in Improvements to Technology, Not Fully Operational

Recommendation 6: Ensure the FOIA branch has sufficient IT support.

Response: Concur. Secret Service FOIA Program has recently procured on-site support from AINS and efforts are underway to update the existing software with the most recent update in an effort to ensure full functionality, system stabilization, increase productivity, improve efficiency, and improve the Program's efforts to reduce the backlog of FOIA/PA requests within this Agency. In addition, the Special Agent in Charge of the Information Resources Management Division (IRMD) has assigned an Information Technology Specialist to work closely with the on-site support from AINS to update and stabilize the FOIAXpress system.

Recommendation 7: Improve ability to check the status of requests by updating the FOIA web page to direct requesters to the Requester Service Center to track requests and discussing how to regularly and securely provide data about the status of USS FOIA requests to the DHS Privacy Office.

Response: Concur. The USSS FOIA Program has had discussions with Information Technology, Cyber Security and Web Content Professionals regarding the most secure way to provide status updates to requesters via Secret Service FOIA Web page. Efforts are underway to provide status of requests to requester via Secret Service's FOIA Web page.

Finding 3: Delay in Communicating with Requesters, Additional Information Needed in Responses

Recommendation 8: Discuss improving the efficiency of referrals from U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to USSS

Response: Concur. U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has agreed to send referrals to Secret Service FOIA Program electronically.

Recommendation 9: Regularly communicate with requesters about the status of requests, particularly regarding the oldest cases.

Response: Concur. USSS FOIA Program has created a template about the status of requests to send out to the requesters, particularly regarding the oldest cases, to provide a status update and an estimated date of completion. The Program plans to implement the use of the new templates immediately.

Recommendation 10: Limit the use of “still interested” letters in accordance with Office of Information Policy guidance.

Response: Concur. The Program has been re-enforcing the appropriate use of “still interested” letters with the staff. The USSS FOIA Program plans to provide additional training to the staff on the proper use of “still interested” letters pursuant to current DOJ guidance.

Recommendation 11: Develop template letters that provide an explanation for why certain material is covered by an exemption.

Response: Concur. The Secret Service FOIA Program has developed template letters that provide an explanation for why certain material is covered by an exemption. The Program plans to implement the use of the letters immediately.

Recommendation 12: Include the total number of pages released in final response once FOIA tracking and processing system is fully functional.

Response: Concur. USSS FOIA Program currently includes the total number of pages released in final responses.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review the results of OGIS’s Compliance Assessment of Secret Service’s FOIA Program. Should you have any questions, please contact Latita Payne at 202-406-5503 or at latita.payne@ussd.dhs.gov.

Sincerely,

Kim Campbell
Special Agent In Charge
Liaison Division