### IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

CITIZENS FOR RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICS IN WASHINGTON, 1331 F Street, NW, Suite 900 Washington, DC 20004,

Plaintiff,

V.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20530, and

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 400 Maryland Avenue SW Washington, DC, 20202, Civil Action No.

Defendants.

# **COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE AND DECLARATORY RELIEF**

1. Plaintiff Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington ("CREW") brings this action under the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 U.S.C. § 552, seeking records relating to reduction-in-force ("RIF") policies and procedures from Defendants U.S. Department of Justice ("DOJ") and U.S. Department of Education ("DOE").

2. CREW seeks declaratory relief that Defendants have violated FOIA by failing to timely respond to CREW's requests, and injunctive relief requiring Defendants to immediately process and release the requested records.

# Jurisdiction and Venue

3. This Court has subject-matter jurisdiction and personal jurisdiction under 5 U.S.C. §§ 552(a)(4)(B) and 552(a)(6)(C)(i). The Court also has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331, 2201(a), and 2202.

4. Venue lies in this district under 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B).

#### **Parties**

5. Plaintiff CREW is a non-profit, non-partisan organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. CREW is committed to protecting the rights of citizens to be informed about the activities of government officials and agencies, and to ensuring the integrity of government officials and agencies. CREW seeks to empower citizens to have an influential voice in government decisions and in the government decision-making process through the dissemination of information about public officials and their actions. To advance its mission, CREW uses a combination of research, litigation, and advocacy. As part of those efforts, CREW uses government records it obtains under FOIA.

6. Defendant DOJ is an agency within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 552(f)(1). The Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") is a component of DOJ. DOJ has possession, custody, and control of records responsive to CREW's FOIA requests.

7. Defendant DOE is an agency within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 552(f)(1). DOE has possession, custody, and control of records responsive to CREW's FOIA requests.

### **Factual Background**

8. President-elect Trump and his close advisers have publicly-announced plans to implement RIFs or "large-scale firings" of employees at numerous federal agencies.<sup>1</sup>

9. One of the co-heads of the President-elect's so-called "Department of

Government Efficiency" has vowed that "large-scale, mass layoffs are absolutely what we will bring to the D.C. bureaucracy."<sup>2</sup>

https://www.wsj.com/opinion/musk-and-ramaswamy-the-doge-plan-to-reform-government-supreme-court-guidance-end-executive-power-grab-fa51c020.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, *Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy: The DOGE Plan to Reform Government,* Wall Street Journal, Nov. 20, 2024,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Eric Katz, *Trump vows to 'dismantle federal bureaucracy' and 'restructure' agencies with new, Musk-led commission*, Government Executive, Nov. 12, 2024,

10. To help answer questions about agencies' operative policies and directives on

RIFs, CREW submitted FOIA requests on July 31, 2024 to DOJ and DOE. On August 26, 2024,

CREW submitted another request to the FBI.

# July 31, 2024 FOIA Requests to DOJ and DOE

11. On July 31, 2024, CREW submitted three materially identical FOIA requests to

DOJ and DOE, seeking the following records:

"We request copies of all delegations of authority to authorize, approve, or initiate a reduction in force; to implement a reduction in force; to define, establish, or identify one or more competitive areas; or to define, establish, or identify one or more competitive levels."

12. Each of CREW's requests sought a fee waiver.

13. On July 31, 2024, CREW received confirmation through FOIA.gov that DOJ had

received CREW's request and was provided the confirmation ID 1330061.

14. By letter dated August 7, 2024, DOJ acknowledged receipt of CREW's request,

assigned it tracking number UMRUFOIA073124-5B.

15. By letter dated August 12, 2024, DOJ invoked a 10-working day extension to its

response deadline due to "unusual circumstances" and assigned the request a new tracking

number FOIA-2024-02974.

16. On October 2, 2024, CREW requested an update on the status of DOJ's response

and received a response that same day stating that DOJ's search was ongoing.

17. By letter dated August 1, 2024, DOE acknowledged receipt of CREW's request, assigned it tracking number 24-02837-F.

18. By letter dated August 27, 2024, DOE provided an update stating that CREW's request was still being processed.

https://www.govexec.com/management/2024/11/trump-vows-dismantle-federal-bureaucracy-and-restructure-agencie s-new-musk-led-commission/400998/

19. By letter dated August 2, 2024, DOE acknowledged receipt of CREW's request, assigning it tracking number HQ-2024-02560-F.

20. To date, CREW has received no other communications from Defendants DOJ or DOE regarding its July 31, 2024 FOIA requests.

### August 26, 2024 FOIA Request to FBI

21. On August 26, 2024, CREW submitted a FOIA request to FBI materially identical to the two requests it sent to DOJ and DOE on July 31, 2024.

22. CREW's request sought a fee waiver.

23. On August 26, 2024, CREW received confirmation through FOIA.gov that FBI had received CREW's request and was provided the confirmation ID 14929441.

24. By email on October 3, 2024, CREW requested an update on the status of FBI's response. CREW received a response that same day stating that its request was "in Initial Processing, where the assigned analyst is searching for, retrieving and reviewing potentially responsive records."

25. By letter on October 15, 2024, FBI acknowledged receipt of CREW's request, assigned it tracking number FOIAPA 1649102-000.

26. To date, CREW has received no other communications from Defendant regarding its August 26, 2024 FOIA request.

### **CREW'S CLAIMS FOR RELIEF**

### COUNT I DOJ's Wrongful Withholding of Records Responsive to CREW's July 31, 2024 FOIA Request

(DOJ Tracking No. FOIA-2024-02974)

27. CREW repeats and re-alleges the foregoing paragraphs.

28. In its July 31, 2024 FOIA request, CREW properly asked for records within the possession, custody, and control of DOJ.

29. DOJ is wrongfully withholding records responsive to CREW's FOIA request.

30. DOJ has failed to conduct adequate searches in response to CREW's FOIA request.

31. By failing to timely release all requested records in full to CREW, DOJ is in violation of FOIA.

32. CREW is therefore entitled to injunctive and declaratory relief requiring immediate processing and disclosure of the records requested in its July 31, 2024 FOIA request to DOJ.

### COUNT II DOE's Wrongful Withholding of Records Responsive to CREW's July 31, 2024 FOIA Request

(DOE Tracking No. 24-02837-F)

33. CREW repeats and re-alleges the foregoing paragraphs.

34. In its July 31, 2024 FOIA request, CREW properly asked for records within the possession, custody, and control of DOE.

35. DOE is wrongfully withholding records responsive to CREW's FOIA request.

36. DOE has failed to conduct adequate searches in response to CREW's FOIA

request.

37. By failing to timely release all requested records in full to CREW, DOE is in violation of FOIA.

38. CREW is therefore entitled to injunctive and declaratory relief requiring immediate processing and disclosure of the records requested in its July 31, 2024 FOIA request to DOE.

### COUNT III DOJ's Wrongful Withholding of Records Responsive to CREW's August 26, 2024 FOIA Request

### (FBI FOIAPA 1649102-000)

39. CREW repeats and re-alleges the foregoing paragraphs.

40. In its August 26, 2024 FOIA request, CREW properly asked for records within

the possession, custody, and control of DOJ and its component FBI.

41. DOJ and its component is wrongfully withholding records responsive to CREW's FOIA request.

42. DOJ and its component FBI have failed to conduct adequate searches in response to CREW's FOIA request.

43. By failing to timely release all requested records in full to CREW, DOJ and its component FBI are in violation of FOIA.

44. CREW is therefore entitled to injunctive and declaratory relief requiring immediate processing and disclosure of the records requested in its August 26, 2024 FOIA request to FBI.

### **Requested Relief**

WHEREFORE, CREW respectfully requests that this Court:

(1) Order Defendants to immediately and fully process CREW's FOIA requests and disclose all non-exempt documents to CREW;

(2) Declare that CREW is entitled to immediate processing and disclosure of the requested records;

- (3) Provide for expeditious proceedings in this action;
- (4) Retain jurisdiction of this action to ensure no agency records are wrongfully

withheld;

- (5) Award CREW its costs and reasonable attorneys' fees in this action; and
- (6) Grant such other relief as the Court may deem just and proper.

Date: December 13, 2024

Respectfully Submitted,

<u>/s/ Alex Goldstein</u> Alex Goldstein (D.C. Bar No. 90005086) Laura Iheanachor (D.C. Bar No. 1782056) CITIZENS FOR RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICS IN WASHINGTON 1331 F St. NW, Suite 900 Washington, DC 20004 Phone: (202) 408-5565 Fax: (202) 508-5020 agoldstein@citizensforethics.org liheanachor@citizenforethics.org

15-44	(Rev. 11/2020 DC)		CIV	IL COV	VER SHEE	Т					
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<ul> <li>K. Labor/ERISA (non-employment)</li> <li>710 Fair Labor Standards Act 720 Labor/Mgmt. Relations 740 Labor Railway Act 751 Family and Medical Leave Act</li> <li>790 Other Labor Litigation 791 Empl. Ret. Inc. Security Act</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>L. Other Civil Rights (non-employment)</li> <li>441 Voting (if not Voting Rights Act)</li> <li>443 Housing/Accommodations</li> <li>440 Other Civil Rights</li> <li>445 Americans w/Disabilities – Employment</li> <li>446 Americans w/Disabilities – Other</li> <li>448 Education</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>M. Contract</li> <li>110 Insurance</li> <li>120 Marine</li> <li>130 Miller Act</li> <li>140 Negotiable Instrument</li> <li>150 Recovery of Overpayment</li> <li>&amp; Enforcement of</li> <li>Judgment</li> <li>153 Recovery of Overpayment</li> <li>of Veteran's Benefits</li> <li>160 Stockholder's Suits</li> <li>190 Other Contracts</li> <li>195 Contract Product Liability</li> <li>196 Franchise</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>N. Three-Judge Court</li> <li>441 Civil Rights – Voting (if Voting Rights Act)</li> </ul>
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#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING CIVIL COVER SHEET JS-44 Authority for Civil Cover Sheet

The JS-44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replaces nor supplements the filings and services of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. Consequently, a civil cover sheet is submitted to the Clerk of Court for each civil complaint filed. Listed below are tips for completing the civil cover sheet. These tips coincide with the Roman Numerals on the cover sheet.

- I. COUNTY OF RESIDENCE OF FIRST LISTED PLAINTIFF/DEFENDANT (b) County of residence: Use 11001 to indicate plaintiff if resident of Washington, DC, 88888 if plaintiff is resident of United States but not Washington, DC, and 99999 if plaintiff is outside the United States.
- III. CITIZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES: This section is completed <u>only</u> if diversity of citizenship was selected as the Basis of Jurisdiction under Section II.
- IV. CASE ASSIGNMENT AND NATURE OF SUIT: The assignment of a judge to your case will depend on the category you select that best represents the <u>primary</u> cause of action found in your complaint. You may select only <u>one</u> category. You <u>must</u> also select <u>one</u> corresponding nature of suit found under the category of the case.
- VI. CAUSE OF ACTION: Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which you are filing and write a brief statement of the primary cause.
- VIII. RELATED CASE(S), IF ANY: If you indicated that there is a related case, you must complete a related case form, which may be obtained from the Clerk's Office.

Because of the need for accurate and complete information, you should ensure the accuracy of the information provided prior to signing the form.

# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

	Plaintiff	)
		)
v.		)
		)
		)
	Defendant	)

Civil Action No.

## SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: (Defendant's name and address)

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 30 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are:

If you fail to respond, judgment by default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

ANGELA D. CAESAR, CLERK OF COURT

Date:

Civil Action No.

### **PROOF OF SERVICE**

# (This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(l))

	This summons for (nam	ne of individual and title,	if any)			
was ree	ceived by me on (date)					
	□ I personally served	the summons on the	individual at (place)			
				on (date)	; or	
	□ I left the summons				ne)	
			-	ble age and discretion		
	on (date)	, and maile	d a copy to the indiv	vidual's last known ac	ddress; or	
	□ I served the summo	ons on (name of individi	ual)			, who is
	designated by law to a	accept service of pro-	cess on behalf of (na	me of organization)		
				on (date)	; or	
	□ I returned the summ	nons unexecuted bec	ause			; or
	<b>Other</b> ( <i>specify</i> ):					
	My fees are \$	for travel a	nd \$	for services, for a to	otal of \$	
	I declare under penalty	y of perjury that this	information is true.			
Date:						
2				Server's signature	2	
				Printed name and ti	tle	

Server's address

# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

	Plaintiff	)
		)
v.		)
		)
		)
	Defendant	)

Civil Action No.

### SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: (Defendant's name and address)

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 30 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are:

If you fail to respond, judgment by default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

ANGELA D. CAESAR, CLERK OF COURT

Date:

Civil Action No.

### **PROOF OF SERVICE**

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	This summons for (nam	ne of individual and title,	if any)			
was rec	ceived by me on (date)		·			
	□ I personally served	the summons on the	individual at (place)			
				on (date)	; or	
	$\Box$ I left the summons	at the individual's re		ce of abode with (name)		
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	□ I served the summer					, who is
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				on (date)		
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	<b>Other</b> ( <i>specify</i> ):					
	My fees are \$	for travel a	nd \$	for services, for a total of \$		·
	I declare under penalty	y of perjury that this	information is true.			
Date:						
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Server's address

# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

	Plaintiff	)
		)
v.		)
		)
		)
	Defendant	)

Civil Action No.

### SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: (Defendant's name and address)

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 30 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are:

If you fail to respond, judgment by default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

ANGELA D. CAESAR, CLERK OF COURT

Date:

Civil Action No.

### **PROOF OF SERVICE**

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	This summons for (nam	me of individual and title,	if any)			
was rec	ceived by me on (date)					
	□ I personally served	I the summons on the	individual at (place)			
				on (date)	; or	
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Server's address

# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

V.	)
v.	
	)
	)
Defendant	)

Civil Action No.

## SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: (Defendant's name and address)

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 30 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are:

If you fail to respond, judgment by default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

ANGELA D. CAESAR, CLERK OF COURT

Date:

Civil Action No.

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# (This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (l))

	This summons for (na	me of individual and title, i	fany)			
was rec	ceived by me on (date)		·			
	□ I personally served	d the summons on the	individual at (place)			
				on (date)	; or	
	$\Box$ I left the summons	s at the individual's res	idence or usual pla	ce of abode with (name)		
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	on (date)	, and mailed	a copy to the indiv	vidual's last known address; or		
	□ I served the summ	ons on (name of individua	ıl)			, who is
	designated by law to	accept service of proc	ess on behalf of (na	me of organization)		
				on (date)	; or	
	$\Box$ I returned the sum	mons unexecuted beca	use			; or
	<b>Other</b> ( <i>specify</i> ):					
	My fees are \$	for travel an	ld \$	_ for services, for a total of \$		·
	I declare under penal	ty of perjury that this i	nformation is true.			
Date:						
		-		Server's signature		
		-		Printed name and title		

Server's address