

Office of Special Counsel

§ 1820.6

(b) *Partially free search time and partially free copying.* Requesters who are not commercial use requesters, educational or noncommercial scientific institution requesters, or news media requesters are “all other requesters”, and are entitled to two hours of free search time and free copying for the first 100 pages. Requests from record subjects for records about themselves filed in a system of records will continue to be treated under the fee provisions of the Privacy Act, which permits the assessment of fees only for copying.

§ 1820.5 Waiver or reduction of fees.

(a) The Associate Special Counsel for Investigation, the Deputy Associate Special Counsel for Prosecution, the Associate Special Counsel for Prosecution, the Deputy Special Counsel, and the Special Counsel may authorize waiver or reduction of fees that could otherwise be assessed if disclosure of the information requested:

(1) Is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the Government, and

(2) Is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.

(b) Satisfaction of paragraph (a)(1) of this section will be determined by all of the following:

(1) Whether the subject of the requested records concerns “the operations or activities of the Government.” The requested records concern identifiable operations or activities of the Government, and the connection between the records and the operations or activities is direct and clear, not remote or attenuated;

(2) Whether disclosure is “likely to contribute” to an understanding of Government operations or activities. An analysis of the substantive content of the releasable portions of the requested records reveals meaningfully informative information on the operations or activities of the Government that is not already in the public domain in duplicative or substantially identical form;

(3) Whether disclosure will contribute to “public understanding.” Considering the identity of the requester and his qualifications to make use of the information, disclosure will contribute to

the understanding of the public at large, and not to the individual understanding of the requester or a narrow segment of interested persons; and

(4) Whether the disclosure is likely to contribute “significantly” to public understanding of Government operations or activities. By an objective standard, the disclosure is likely to enhance the general public’s understanding of the subject matter in question more than minimally.

(c) Satisfaction of paragraph (a)(2) of this section will be determined by both of the following:

(1) Whether the requester has a commercial interest to be furthered by the disclosure. The requester does not seek to further a commercial, trade, or profit interest, as those terms are commonly understood; and

(2) Whether the magnitude of the identified commercial interest of the requester is sufficiently large, compared to the public interest in disclosure, that disclosure is “primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.” If the requester has a commercial interest, that interest is not greater than the public interest to be served by disclosure of the requested records.

§ 1820.6 Fees to be charged.

(a) Requests for records are subject to the following fees:

(1) *Commercial use requesters.* For search, review, and copying: Photocopies per page, \$0.25. Manual record search, \$2.50 per quarter hour if conducted by a clerical employee; \$5.00 per quarter hour if conducted by a professional or managerial employee. Search fees may be assessed even if the records in question are not located or if the records located are determined to be exempt from disclosure.

(2) *Educational and noncommercial scientific institution requesters, news media requesters.* For copying only: Photocopies per page, \$0.25, excluding the first 100 pages.

(3) *All other requesters.* For search and copying only: Photocopies per page (excluding the first 100 pages), \$0.25. Manual record search (excluding the first two hours), \$2.50 per quarter hour if conducted by a clerical employee; \$5.00

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per quarter hour if conducted by a professional or managerial employee.

(b) *Method of search.* (1) Any “search”, which includes all time spent looking for material that is responsive to a request, will be done in the most efficient and least expensive manner in order to minimize costs for both the agency and the requester.

(2) For researches made by computer, costs will be assessed when the hourly cost of operating the central processing unit and the operator’s hourly salary plus 16 percent equals the equivalent dollar amount of two hours of salary of the person performing the search.

(c) *Review charges.* Only commercial use requesters will be charged for time spent reviewing records to determine whether they are exempt from mandatory disclosure. These charges will be assessed only for initial review (i.e., the review undertaken when first analyzing the applicability of a specific exemption to a particular record or portion of record), and not for review at the administrative appeal level of an exemption already applied. However, charges will be assessed for a second review of records or portions of records withheld in full under an exemption which is subsequently determined not to apply in order to determine the applicability of other exemptions not previously considered. Review charges shall not include costs incurred in resolving issues of law or policy that may be raised in the course of processing a request.

(d) *Copying.* A “page” of copying refers to a paper copy of standard size, normally 8½”x11” or 11x14”. However, copies may also take the form of microform, audio-visual materials, or machine readable documentation (e.g., magnetic tape or disk), among others.

(e) *Nonassessment of fees.* No fees will be assessed to any requester, including commercial use requesters, if the cost of routine collection and processing of the fee would be equal to or greater than the fee itself. To make this determination, the OSC will consider the administrative costs of receiving and recording a requester’s remittance and processing the fee for deposit.

(f) *Other charges.* Complying with requests for special services, such as certification of records as true copies and

sending records by special methods (e.g., express mail) is entirely at the discretion of the Office. Since neither the Freedom of Information Act nor its fee structure covers these kinds of services, the OSC will assess fees to recover the full costs of providing these services should the Office elect to provide them.

(g) *Aggregating requests.* If the Office of Special Counsel reasonably believes that a requester or a group of requesters acting in concert is filing a series of requests for the purpose of evading the assessment of fees, the OSC may aggregate the requests and assess fees accordingly. One element to be considered in determining reasonable belief is the time period within which the requests are filed. Multiple requests of this type filed within a 30-day period may be presumed to have been made to avoid fees. In no case will the Office aggregate requests on unrelated subjects from one requester.

(h) *Advance notice of fees.* If it is likely that fees will exceed \$25, the requester will first be notified of the estimated amount, unless the requester has indicated in advance his willingness to pay fees as high as those anticipated. The notice will offer the requester the opportunity to confer with personnel of the Office of the Special Counsel with the object of reformulating the request to meet his or her needs at a lower cost.

§ 1820.7 Payments and collections.

(a) *Payments.* Payment of fees shall be made by check or money order payable to the United States Treasury.

(b) *Advance payments.* A requester is not required to make an advance payment unless:

(1) The OSC estimates or determines that the requester may be required to pay fees in excess of \$250, in which case the requester will be notified of the estimated cost. The requester must then furnish satisfactory assurance of full payment if the requester has a history of prompt payment of Freedom of Information Act fees. If the requester has no history of payment, then the requester may be required to furnish an advance payment up to the full estimated cost; or