

December 28, 2017

FOIA/PA Mail Referral Unit
Department of Justice
Room 115
LOC Building
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a request under the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), 5 U.S.C. § 552, *et seq.* submitted on behalf of Muslim Advocates.

Background

Muslim Advocates seeks records pertaining to the involvement of the Department of Justice (“DOJ”) with efforts directed at Countering Violent Extremism (“CVE”). In particular, we seek records concerning DOJ’s involvement with the Montgomery County Model (“MCM”), which has been characterized as a “public-private partnership.” MCM operates in connection with the Montgomery County Executive’s Office of Community Partnerships (“OCP”), OCP’s Faith Community Working Group (“FCWG”), the Montgomery County Police Department (“MCPD”) and the World Organization for Resource Development and Education (“WORDE”).¹ Through the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (“COPS”), DOJ has previously funded efforts in Montgomery County in support of the MCM and WORDE.²

We also seek records concerning OCP’s involvement with the efforts of the organization Strong Cities and its parent, Institute for Strategic Dialogue (“ISD”) in Montgomery County, MD. Strong Cities states that it aims to connect cities and communities through workshops, trainings, and city partnerships to prevent “violent extremism.” Strong Cities’ website lists

¹ Dep’t of Justice, FY 2017 PERFORMANCE BUDGET: OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES 31 (2017), *available at* <https://www.justice.gov/jmd/file/821491/download>.

² *Id.*

Montgomery County among its partner cities on its website.³ DOJ has previously acknowledged its involvement with the launch of the Strong Cities Network.⁴

We additionally seek documents relating to government-funded CVE efforts in the region surrounding Montgomery County.

Records⁵ Requested

1. Records concerning any events, meetings, conferences, briefings, workshops, and/or trainings attended by DOJ personnel relating to Strong Cities, ISD, the MCM, WORDE, or CVE;
2. Records or communications by DOJ personnel with representatives of Strong Cities, ISD, or WORDE regarding the MCM or any other CVE effort;
3. Correspondence or any other communications by DOJ personnel concerning Strong Cities, ISD, the MCM, WORDE, or CVE;
4. Records or communications by DOJ personnel concerning the development, funding, or implementation of CVE programs in Montgomery County, MD, including but not limited to the MCM, in Montgomery County public schools and public universities such as the University of Maryland;

³ *Member Cities*, STRONG CITIES, <http://strongcitiesnetwork.org/strong-cities/member-cities/>.

⁴ Press Release, Dep't of Justice Office of Public Affairs, *Launch of Strong Cities Network to Strengthen Community Resilience Against Violent Extremism* (Sept. 28, 2015), available at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/launch-strong-cities-network-strengthen-community-resilience-against-violent-extremism>.

⁵ For purposes of this request, "Record" means a record in the broadest sense possible, and includes, without limitation, everything tangible, electronic, or digital containing a datum, number, photograph, picture, word, or any other information, including, but not limited to, communications between phones or other electronic devices, e-mails, digital or physical images, video, audio recordings, voicemail messages, social media posts, instructions, directives, guidance documents, formal and informal presentations, training documents, bulletins, notices, alerts, updates, advisories, reports, legal and policy memoranda, contracts, agreements, minutes or notes of meetings and phone calls, and memoranda of understanding. We seek responsive documents within the time period of January 2013 to the date this request is completed.

5. Records or communications by DOJ personnel concerning the development or implementation of CVE programs in Montgomery County, MD including but not limited to the MCM, in Montgomery County houses of worship, including but not limited to mosques;
6. All CVE Program grant applications submitted by WORDE;
7. Records relating to any evaluations of WORDE’s Building Resistance Against Violent Extremism (“BRAVE”) undertaken by DOJ⁶;
8. Records or communications relating to any work or efforts Dr. Hedieh Mirahmadi and/or WORDE have undertaken in conjunction with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”) or DOJ, including any contract or agreement detailing the terms of such arrangement;
9. Any reports, documents, meetings, briefings, conferences, workshops, and trainings stemming from a collaboration between Dr. Mirahmadi, WORDE, and the FBI or DOJ⁷;
10. Any other records or communications relating to the development and implementation of CVE programs in Montgomery County, MD and/or the Montgomery County Model;
11. Any records, documents, or communications relating to the CVE grant for ANSER for its activities in Prince George’s County MD; and
12. Any records, documents, or communications relating to the TAM Group.

⁶ See e.g., The Building Resistance Against Violent Extremism (BRAVE) Model Strategic Plan 2016-2019, World Organization for Resource Development and Education 11 (2016), http://www.worde.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Strategic-Plan_final_v3_090616.pdf (referencing an evaluation funded by the Community Oriented Policing Services (“COPS”) in the Department of Justice and carried out by the Police Executive Research Forum).

⁷ Michael Hirsh, Inside the FBI’s Secret Muslim Network, POLITICO (Mar. 24, 2016), <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/03/fbi-muslim-outreach-terrorism-213765> (“DHS and the Justice Department have also been consulting for years with Muslim community organizers such as Hedieh Mirahmadi, a lawyer and activist based in Montgomery County, Maryland, who generally supports the government’s outreach efforts and believes they could go even farther in frankly confronting the Islamist source of radicalization.”)

Application for Waiver of Fees

Muslim Advocates requests a waiver of document search, review, and duplication fees on the grounds that disclosure is in the public interest because it is “likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government and is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.” 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii). Muslim Advocates is a non-profit civil rights and advocacy organization that focuses on issues of particular relevance to the Muslim community.⁸ Here, the requested records detail the development of CVE programs in Montgomery County and the relationship between DOJ and partner organizations working on such programs. The value and implementation of such programs are highly debated, especially among parts of the Muslim community. Members of the public residing in Montgomery County—and particularly Montgomery County’s concerned Muslim constituents—have a significant and urgent interest in knowing how the Montgomery County Model for countering violent extremism operates in and affects their communities and their lives.

Even if a waiver is not granted, fees should be “limited to reasonable standard charges for document duplication” because Muslim Advocates is a “representative of the news media” and the records are not sought for commercial use. 5 U.S.C. § 552(4)(A)(ii)(II). Other organizations similar to Requestor in mission, function, and educational activities have been found by courts to be representatives of the news media. *See Elec. Privacy Info. Ctr. v. Dep’t of Defense*, 241 F. Supp. 2d 5, 10–15 (D.D.C. 2003) (a non-profit educational organization qualified under the news media category); *Nat’l Sec. Archive v. Dep’t of Defense*, 880 F.2d 1381, 1387 (D.C. Cir. 1989) (a non-profit research organization qualified under the news media category).

Finally, Muslim Advocates does not seek to use the information requested for commercial use, 22 C.F.R. § 171.16(a)(2), and does not have a commercial interest that would be furthered by the disclosure. Instead, their primary interest in the disclosure of information is to educate the public and advocate for the rights of Americans to be free from racial and religious profiling. § 171.16(a)(2)(i)-(ii).

Response Requested in 10 days

Your attention to this request is appreciated, and Muslim Advocates anticipates your determination of our request within ten (10) calendar days pursuant to 28 C.F.R. § 16.5(d)(4).

To the extent that our Request encompasses records responsive or potentially responsive to the Request that have been destroyed, our Request should be interpreted to include, but is not limited to, any and all records relating or referring to the destruction of those records. This

⁸ *About*, MUSLIM ADVOCATES, <https://www.muslimadvocates.org/about/>.

includes, but is not limited to, any and all records relating or referring to the events leading to the destruction of those records.

With respect to the form of production, see 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(3)(B), we request that responsive electronic records be provided electronically in their native file format, if possible. Alternatively, we request that the records be provided electronically in a text-searchable, static-image format (e.g., PDF), in the best image quality in the agency's possession, and that the records be provided in separate, Bates-stamped files.

If you have any questions concerning this request, you may contact me at nimra@muslimadvocates.org or at (202) 897-2564.

Very truly yours,



Nimra H. Azmi
Staff Attorney