

§ 806.29

32 CFR Ch. VII (7–1–14 Edition)

(g) AFI 36–2906, Personal Financial Responsibility.

(h) AFI 36–2907, Unfavorable Information File (UIF) Program.

(i) AFI 40–301, Family Advocacy.

(j) AFI 41–210, Patient Administration Functions.

(k) AFI 44–109, Mental Health and Military Law.

(l) AFI 51–201, Administration of Military Justice.

(m) AFI 51–301, Civil Litigation.

(n) AFI 51–303, Intellectual Property—Patents, Patent Related Matters, Trademarks, and Copyrights.

(o) AFI 51–501, Tort Claims.

(p) AFI 51–503, Aircraft, Missile, Nuclear and Space Accident Investigations.

(q) AFI 51–504, Legal Assistance, Notary and Preventive Law Programs.

(r) AFI 51–1102, Cooperation with the Office of the Special Counsel.

(s) AFI 61–204, Disseminating Scientific and Technical Information.

(t) AFI 61–303, Licensing Inventions Made Under Cooperative Research and Development Agreements.

(u) AFI 71–101, Volume 1, Criminal Investigations, and Volume 2, Protective Service Matters.

(v) AFI 84–101, Historical Products, Services, and Requirements.

(w) AFI 90–301, Inspector General Complaints.

(x) AFI 91–204, Safety Investigations and Reports.

§ 806.29 Administrative processing of Air Force FOIA requests.

(a) This section is a checklist format of processing steps and explanations of Air Force and DoD guidance. Each MAJCOM may elect to prepare its own checklists to tailor FOIA processing actions within its own organizations to meet their specific needs, so long as it remains consistent with guidance contained in DoD 5400.7–R, DoD Freedom of Information Act Program, and this part.

(b) Procedures: FOIA requests.

(1) Note the date the request was received, give the request a unique identifier/number, and log the request.

(2) Assess the request to determine initial processing requirements:

(3) Determine what Air Force elements may hold responsive records.

(i) Are responsive records kept at the same or different installations?

(ii) Is referral of (all/part) of the request required?

(4) Determine appropriate processing track (simple/complex/expedited). (Air Force FOIA offices without backlogs do not multitrack FOIA requests.)

NOTE: Requesters have a right to appeal an adverse tracking decision (for example, when it is determined their request will not be expedited). Also, if their request qualifies for the complex track, tell requesters so they may limit the scope of their request in order to qualify for the simple track. FOIA managers must assess a request before placing it into a specific processing track, and must support their actions should the requester appeal. If a request is determined to be complex, or is not expedited when the requester sought expedited processing, you must advise the requester of the adverse tracking decision in writing. See § 806.27 for sample language for this kind of letter to a requester.

(i) Simple. Defines a request that can be processed quickly, with limited impact on the responding units. The request clearly identifies the records, involves no (or few) complicating factors (e.g., there are few or no responsive records, involves only one installation and there are no outside OPRs, involves no classified records (Exemption 1), a law exempts the responsive records from disclosure (Exemption 3), no contractor-submitted records (Exemption 4), no deliberative process/privileged materials (Exemption 5), records contain no (or limited) personal privacy information/did not come from Privacy Act systems of records concerning other individuals (Exemption 6), release of records would have minimal impact on law enforcement (Exemption 7); no time extensions expected, other than the additional 10-workdays allowed in situations outlined in the FOIA). If the requested data must come from electronic records, response can be completed on a “business-as-usual” basis; requires no (or limited) reprogramming of automated information systems and would cause no significant interference with operation of information systems by processing a simple request/providing a response in the electronic format requested.

(ii) Complex. Defines a request whose processing will take substantial time,

will cause significant impact on responding units. Complications and delays are likely (e.g., the request is vague (poor description of records, unclear who or when records were created), records are massive in volume, multiple organizations will receive tasking, records are classified (Exemption 1), records came from another command/service/a nongovernment source (Exemption 4), records are part of the Air Force's decision-making process, and not incorporated into a final decision (IG/audit reports, legal opinions, misconduct or mishap investigations etc.) or are attorney-client records (Exemption 5), records are largely personal information on another individual or came from Privacy Act systems of records (Exemption 6), records describe law enforcement activities or information from (and/or identities of) confidential sources (Exemption 7); response cannot be completed on a "business as usual" basis and would require extensive reprogramming or cause significant interference with operation of the automated information systems. (Advise requester, in writing, of right to limit the scope of their request in order to qualify for simple track.)

(iii) An expedited request is when a requester asks for expedited processing and explains the compelling need (imminent threat to life or physical safety; urgently needed by a person primarily engaged in disseminating information; due process; or humanitarian need) for the requested information. In order to receive expedited processing, requesters must provide a statement certifying their "demonstration" (description) of their specific "compelling need" or due process/humanitarian need is true and correct to the best of their knowledge. When a requester seeks expedited processing, FOIA offices must respond in writing to the requester within 10 calendar days after receipt of the request approving or denying their request for expedited processing. Requesters have a right to appeal an adverse decision (e.g., when it is determined their requests will not be expedited). There are four categories of FOIA requests that qualify for expedited processing:

(A) The requester asserts a "compelling need" for the records, because a failure to obtain records quickly could reasonably be expected to pose an imminent threat to the life or physical safety of an individual.

(B) The requester asserts a "compelling need" for the records, because the information is "urgently needed" by an individual engaged in disseminating information to inform the public (primarily news media requesters; and could also include other persons with the ability to disseminate information).

NOTE: "Urgently needed," in this case, means the information has a particular value that will be lost if it is not disseminated quickly. This normally would apply to a breaking news story of general public interest. Information of historical interest only, or sought for litigation or commercial activities would not qualify, nor would the fact a news media entity had an internal broadcast deadline of its own, which was unrelated to the "news breaking nature" of the information itself, cause the requested information to qualify as "urgently needed."

(C) Failure to obtain records quickly could cause imminent loss of substantial due process rights or providing the information quickly would serve a "humanitarian need" (i.e., disclosing the information will promote the welfare and interests of mankind). While FOIA requests falling into these third and fourth categories can qualify for expedited processing, process them in the expedited track behind the requests qualifying for expedited processing based on "compelling need" (the first two types of expedited FOIA requests).

(5) Determine fee category of requester (commercial/educational—noncommercial scientific institution—news media/all others) and assess fee issues. When all assessable costs are \$15.00 or less, waive fees automatically for all categories of requesters. Assess other fee waiver or reduction requests on a case-by-case basis.

(6) Apply fee waiver/fee reduction criteria in appropriate cases (when requester asks for fee waiver/reduction).

(7) Find the responsive Air Force records (if any).

(i) Send the request to the appropriate OPRs to search for responsive records and to decide whether to recommend release of any responsive

§ 806.29

32 CFR Ch. VII (7-1-14 Edition)

records. Include a DD Form 2086, Record of Freedom of Information (FOI), or a DD Form 2086-1, Record of Freedom of Information (FOI) Processing Cost for Technical Data, in each request. The OPR must complete and return the appropriate forms and statements to the FOIA office.

(ii) If the OPRs find no responsive records, or if the OPRs desire to withhold any responsive records from release to the requester, the OPRs must provide a written certificate detailing either their unsuccessful search, or their reasons why the documents should be withheld from release under the FOIA; the written OPR statements must accompany the copies of the records the OPR desires to withhold as the FOIA action is processed (e.g., include it in any denial or appeal file).

NOTE: If any part of a FOIA request is denied, and the requester appeals that denial, include all forms, certificates and documents prepared by the OPRs in the FOIA appeal package required in paragraph (d)(5) of this section.

(c) Contacts with FOIA requesters and non-Air Force submitters of data.

(1) Contacts with Air Force elements. A FOIA request is considered "received" (and therefore ready to process) when the FOIA office responsible for processing the request physically receives it, when the requester states a willingness to pay fees set for the appropriate fee category, or, if applicable, when the requester has paid any past FOIA debts and has reasonably described the requested records. Keep hard/paper copies of all memoranda documenting requester contacts with Air Force elements regarding a pending FOIA request in the requester's FOIA file. If the requester contacts Air Force elements telephonically about a pending FOIA request, the Air Force member participating in the conversation must prepare notes or memorandums for record (MFR), and keep those notes or MFRs in the requester's FOIA file. If any part of a FOIA request is denied, and the requester appeals that denial, submit documentation of requester contacts with Air Force elements in chronological order in the FOIA appeal package (see paragraph (d)(1) of this section).

(2) Contacts with the FOIA Requester. See §806.27 for samples of language to use in various types of Air Force FOIA letters. If any part of a FOIA request is denied, and the requester appeals that denial, submit documents sent by Air Force elements to the requester in the FOIA appeal package in chronological order (see paragraph (d)(5) of this section). Letters that Air Force FOIA offices may need to send to a FOIA requester include:

(i) An initial notification letter that the FOIA request was received. This letter may advise the requester that processing of the FOIA request may be delayed because:

(A) All or part of the requested records are not located at the installation processing the FOIA request (see §806.29(c)(2)(ii)).

(B) An enormous number of records must be collected and reviewed.

(C) Other Air Force activities or other agencies, to include (if applicable) the nongovernment submitter of information, need to be involved in deciding whether or not to release the records.

(D) If you cannot complete processing of a FOIA request within 20 workdays, advise the requester of the reasons for the delay and give a date (within 30 workdays after receiving the request) when the requester can expect a final decision.

(ii) The initial notification letter may advise the requester all/part of the request was referred to another Air Force element or government activity.

(iii) The initial notification letter may advise the requester of the appropriate fee category. In cases where fees are appropriate, and requesters have not agreed to pay for responsive records and fees are likely to be more than \$15.00, seek assurances that the requester agrees to pay appropriate fees. If more information is needed to make a fee category determination, or to determine whether fees should be waived/reduced, inform the requester. FOIA offices may determine fee waiver/reduction requests before processing a FOIA request; if a fee waiver/reduction request is denied, the requester may

appeal that denial; he/she may also appeal an adverse fee category determination (e.g., asked for news media fees, but was assessed commercial fees.)

(iv) The initial notification letter may advise the requester the request does not sufficiently describe the desired records. If possible, help the requester identify the requested records by explaining what kind of information would make searching for responsive records easier.

(v) If Air Force elements can complete a FOIA request within the statutory 20-workday processing period, you may elect to send only a single letter to the requester, along with responsive records that are released to the requester in full.

(vi) A letter to the requester that the responding FOIA office uses multitrack processing due to a significant number of pending requests that prevents a response determination from being made within 20 workdays. This letter advises the FOIA requester that track the request is in (simple/complex); in this letter, if expedited processing was requested, the requester is advised if the request will be expedited or not. If the request is found to be complex, you must advise the requester he/she may alter the FOIA request to simplify processing. If it is determined the request will not be expedited, the requester must be told he/she can appeal. (This may be the initial letter to the requester, for Air Force elements with multitrack processing; if that is the case, this letter may include sections discussed in §806.29(c)(2)(i)).

(vii) Subsequent letters to the requester on various subjects (for example, releasing requested records; advising reasons for delays; responding to the letters, facsimiles or calls; advising the requester of referrals to other Air Force units or government activities; involves a non-Air Force submitter, etc.).

(viii) A release letter to the requester, forwarding releasable responsive records with a bill (if appropriate).

(ix) A “no records” response letter to the requester if there are no responsive records, or, a denial letter, if any responsive records are withheld from release. FOIA managers may sign “no

records” or “requested format not available” responses; they may also sign a letter that advises a requester the fee category sought was not determined to be appropriate, or that a fee waiver/fee reduction request was disapproved, or that a request for expedited processing has been denied. An IDA must sign any letter or document withholding responsive records. When denying records, you must tell the requester, in writing: the name and title or position of the official who made the denial determination, the basis for the denial in enough detail to permit the requester to make a decision concerning appeal, and the FOIA exemptions on which the denial is based. The denial letter must include a brief statement describing what the exemptions cover. When the initial denial is based (in whole or in part) on a security classification, this explanation should include a summary of the applicable executive order criteria for classification, as well as an explanation of how those criteria apply to the particular record in question. Estimate the volume of the records denied and provide this estimate to the requester, unless providing such an estimate would harm an interest protected by an exemption of the FOIA. This estimate should be in number of pages or, for records in other media, in some other reasonable form of estimation, unless the volume is otherwise indicated through deletions on records disclosed in part. Indicate the size and location of the redactions on the records released. You must also tell the requester how he/she can appeal the denial.

(3) Contacts with non-Air Force submitters of data. Before releasing data (information or records) submitted from outside the Air Force, determine whether you need to write to the submitter of the data for their views on releasability of their data. In many cases, this non-Air Force data may fall under FOIA Exemption 4. If it appears you must contact the submitter of the data, advise the requester in writing that you must give the submitter of the data the opportunity to comment before the Air Force decides whether to release the information. Give the submitter a reasonable period of time (30 calendar days) to object to release and

§ 806.29

32 CFR Ch. VII (7-1-14 Edition)

provide justification for withholding the documents. If the submitter does not respond, advise the submitter in writing that you have not received a reply and plan to release the records. Provide the submitter with the reasons the Air Force will release the records, and give the submitter your expected release date (at least 2 weeks from the date of your letter). This permits the submitter time to seek a temporary restraining order (TRO) in federal court, if they can convince the judge to issue such an order. See §806.27 for samples of language to use in Air Force letters to both the FOIA requester and nongovernment submitters. Remember to include a copy of §806.31 as an attachment to the letter sent to the nongovernment submitter.

(i) The notice requirements of this section need not be followed if the Air Force determines that the information should not be disclosed, the information has been lawfully published or officially made available to the public, or disclosure of the information is required by law.

(ii) If the submitter objects to release of the records, but the Air Force disclosure authority considers the records releasable, tell the submitter before releasing the data. Include in the letter to the submitter a brief explanation and a specific release date at least 2 weeks from the date of the letter. Advise the submitter once a determination is made that release of the data is required under the FOIA, failure to oppose the proposed release will lead to release of submitted data. Also advise the requester such a release under the FOIA will result in the released information entering the public domain, and that subsequent requests for the same information will be answered without any formal coordination between the Air Force and the submitter, unless the information is later amended, changed, or modified. A person equal to, or higher in rank than, the denial authority makes the final decision to disclose responsive records over the submitter's objection.

(iii) When a previously released contract document has been modified, any contract documents not in existence at the time of an earlier FOIA request that are responsive to a later FOIA re-

quest for the same contract, will be processed as a first-time FOIA request for those newly created documents. Notify the nongovernment submitter of the pending FOIA action, and give them the same opportunity to respond as is detailed above. Passage of a significant period of time since the prior FOIA release can also require Air Force elements to comply with the notice requirements in this paragraph.

(d) Denying all or part of a request. When responsive records are withheld from release (denied), the appropriate offices must prepare a denial package for the IDA. Air Force elements must send the request, related documents, and responsive records through their IDA's FOIA office to the IDA for a decision. The denial package must include:

(1) The FOIA request and any modifications by the requester.

(2) A copy of the responsive records, including both records that may be released and records recommended for denial.

(3) Written recommendations from the OPRs and an Air Force attorney.

(4) The exemptions cited and a discussion of how the records qualify for withholding under the FOIA. This discussion should also include the reasons for denial: to deny release of responsive records requested under the FOIA, you must determine that disclosure of the records would result in a foreseeable harm to an interest protected by a FOIA exemption (or exemptions), that the record is exempt from release under one or more of the exemptions of the FOIA, and that a discretionary release is not appropriate.

(5) Any collateral documents that relate to the requested records. For example:

(i) If the requested records came from a non-Air Force or non-U.S. Federal Government submitter, include any documents from the submitter that relate to the release or denial of the requested records. If you are not sure whether or not the non-Air Force or non-U.S. Federal Government submitted information is potentially exempt from release under the FOIA, contact an Air Force attorney. FOIA Exemptions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 may apply.

(ii) If the requested records came from Privacy Act systems of records,

Department of the Air Force, DoD

§ 806.29

include a written discussion of any Privacy Act issues.

(iii) If any requested records came from another Air Force element, or release of the requested records would affect another Air Force element, FOIA offices should coordinate with that other element. If the FOIA request is not completely referred to the other element, include documents from that element.

(iv) If any requested records are classified, include a written certification from a classification authority or declassification authority stating the data was properly classified originally, that it remains properly classified (per E.O. 12958), and, if applicable, that no reasonably segregable portions can be released.

(e) FOIA appeal actions.

(1) If an IDA, or a FOIA office responding on behalf of an IDA, withholds a record from release because they determine the record is exempt under one or more of the exemptions to the FOIA, the requester may appeal that decision, in writing, to the Secretary of the Air Force. The appeal should be accompanied by a copy of the denial letter. FOIA appeals should be postmarked within 60 calendar days after the date of the denial letter, and should contain the reasons the requester disagrees with the initial denial. Late appeals may be rejected, either by the element initially processing the FOIA appeal, or by subsequent denial authorities, if the requester does not provide adequate justification for the delay. Appeal procedures also apply to the denial of a fee category claim by a requester, denial of a request for waiver or reduction of fees, disputes regarding fee estimates, review on an expedited basis of a determination not to grant expedited access to agency records, and for "no record" or "requested format not available" determinations when the requester considers such responses adverse in nature.

(2) Coordinate appeals with an Air Force attorney (and the OPR, if appropriate) so they can consider factual and legal arguments raised in the appeal, and can prepare written assessments of issues raised in the appeal to assist the IDA in considering the appeal.

MAJCOM FOIA offices and 11 CS/SCSR (for OPRs at HQ USAF and SAF), send all appeals to the Secretary of the Air Force through AFLSA/JACL for consideration, unless the IDA has reconsidered the initial denial action, and granted the appeal.

(3) If a requester appeals a "no records" determination, organizations must search again or verify the adequacy of their first search (for example, if a second search would be fruitless, the organization may include a signed statement from either the records OPR or the MAJCOM FOIA manager detailing why another search was not practical). The appeal package must include documents (to include a certification from the records OPR) that show how the organization tried to find responsive records. In the event a requester sues the Air Force to contest a determination that no responsive records exist, formal affidavits will be required to support the adequacy of any searches conducted.

(4) General administrative matters. FOIA requesters may ultimately sue the Air Force in federal court if they are dissatisfied with adverse determinations. In these suits, the contents of the administrative appeal file are evaluated to determine whether the Air Force complied with the FOIA and its own guidance. Improper or inadequate appeal files make defending these cases problematic. Include all the documents related to the requester's FOIA action in the appeal file. If appeal file documents are sensitive, or are classified up to the SECRET level, send them separately to AFLSA/JACL, 1501 Wilson Boulevard, 7th Floor, Arlington, VA 22209-2403. Make separate arrangements with AFLSA/JACL for processing classified appeal file documents TOP SECRET or higher. Cover letters on appeal packages need to list all attachments. If a FOIA action is complicated, a chronology of events helps reviewers understand what happened in the course of the request and appeal. If an appeal file does not include documentation described below, include a blank sheet in proper place and mark as "not applicable," "N/A," or "not used." Do not renumber and move the other items up. If any part of

§ 806.30

the requester's appeal is denied, the appeal package must include a signed statement by the IDA, demonstrating the IDA considered and rejected the requester's arguments, and the basis for that decision. This may be a separate memorandum, an endorsement on a legal opinion or OPR opinion, or the cover letter which forwards the appeal for final determination. Include in the cover letter forwarding the appeal to the Secretary of the Air Force the name, phone number and e-mail address (if any) of the person to contact about the appeal. The order and contents of appeal file attachments follow.

(i) The original appeal letter and envelope.

(ii) The initial FOIA request, any modifications of the request by the requester or any other communications from the requester, in chronological order.

(iii) The denial letter.

(iv) Copies of all records already released. (An index of released documents may be helpful, if there are a number of items. If the records released are "massive" (which means "several cubic feet") and AFLSA/JACL agrees, an index or description of the records may be provided in place of the released records. Do not send appeal files without copies of released records without the express agreement of AFLSA/JACL. Usually AFLSA/JACL requires all the released records in appeal files. If you do not send the released records to AFLSA/JACL when a FOIA requester has appealed a partial denial, retain a copy of what was released for 6 years.)

(v) Copies of all administrative processing documents, including extension letters, search descriptions, and initial OPR recommendations about the request, in chronological order.

(vi) Copies of the denied records or portions marked to show what was withheld. If your organization uses a single set of highlighted records (to show items redacted from records released to the requester), ensure the records are legible and insert a page in the appropriate place stating where the records are located. (An index of denied documents may be helpful, if there are a number of items. If the records denied are "massive" (which means

32 CFR Ch. VII (7-1-14 Edition)

"several cubic feet") and AFLSA/JACL agrees, an index or description of the records may be provided in place of the denied records. Do not send appeal files without copies of denied records without the express agreement of AFLSA/JACL. Usually AFLSA/JACL requires all the denied records in appeal files. If you do not send the denied records to AFLSA/JACL, when a FOIA requester has appealed a denial, retain a copy of what was denied for 6 years.)

(vii) All legal opinions in chronological order. Include a point-by-point discussion of factual and legal arguments in the requester's appeal (prepared by an Air Force attorney and/or the OPR). If the IDA does not state in the cover letter he/she signed, that he/she considered and rejected the requester's arguments, asserting the basis for that decision (e.g., the IDA concurs in the legal and/or OPR assessments of the requester's arguments) include a signed, written statement containing the same information from the IDA, either as a separate document or an endorsement to a legal or OPR assessment. Include any explanation of the decision-making process for intra-agency documents denied under the deliberative process privilege and how the denied material fits into that process (if applicable).

§ 806.30 FOIA exempt information examples.

(a) Certain responsive records may contain parts that are releasable, along with other parts that the Air Force must withhold from release. Carefully delete information exempt from release under the FOIA from copies of otherwise releasable records. Do not release copies that would permit the requester to "read through the marking." In order to assist FOIA managers in redacting records, selected items appropriate to withhold in commonly requested Air Force records are illustrated below. When providing releasable portions from classified paragraphs, line through and do not delete, the classification marking preceding the paragraph.

(b) Exemption 1. Example used is an extract from a "simulated" contingency plan (all information below is