

New Website Tracks FOIA Withholding Challenges

(30 Mar 2011) Syracuse, NY -- Details about every new court challenge to the withholding of information by the Obama Administration are now available on a new website developed by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC). Designed to bring more transparency to FOIA withholding decisions, the new site -- <http://FOIAproject.org> -- gives the American people a way to track all instances in which a federal agency's decision to deny government records has become the subject of a suit under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) since October 1, 2009.

The site, supported with a grant from the CS Fund/Warsh-Mott Legacy, is updated daily with the latest court FOIA filings and provides extensive information about the names of withholding agency, the names of the plaintiffs, the location where the action was brought, along with the actual complaint and attachments that were filed.

TRAC sees this ground-breaking website as only a first step in a much broader community effort to expand the withholding decisions covered, and to improve the site's features. While this first phase focuses on court challenges to withholding, later phases are planned to expand coverage to turndowns at the initial request and administrative appeal levels. The ultimate goal: to mobilize the power of public exposure to encourage a more transparent government.

Links on the new site allow the public to offer suggestions and to volunteer to help on the project. Currently under consideration is the addition of a mechanism by which requestors can post current egregious examples of FOIA withholding decisions to share with a wider audience.

TRAC, a part of Syracuse University, was established more than two decades ago to obtain detailed information from various federal agencies under the FOIA, check its accuracy and completeness and make the data available to the public through its two web sites, <http://trac.syr.edu> and <http://tracfed.syr.edu>. Over the years, this effort has required TRAC to file suits in federal court against the Internal Revenue Service, the Office of Personnel Management, the National Archives and Records Administration, and various components of the Justice Department including the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys and the Civil Division.



Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, Syracuse University
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