

2017 Chief FOIA Officer Report for the Postal Regulatory Commission

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The Commission operates by the principles of openness, integrity, merit, and adaptability as outlined in our Strategic Plan. In line with these principles, the Commission is committed to transparency, accountability, and open government in its Freedom of Information Act responsibilities.

The Commission prides itself on the high priority given to responding completely and properly to all requests, and how fully, professionally, and quickly we respond. During FY 2016, the Commission received 31 FOIA requests, and provided responses to all requests within the statutory deadline of 20 business days. Our FOIA office is committed to the “spirit of cooperation”, and works to ensure there is good communication and good customer service when working with our requesters. The Commission has a dedicated e-mail inbox solely for FOIA requests. This inbox is monitored on a daily basis by the Commission’s FOIA team. During FY 2016, the Commission also adjusted our public website to make it easier to find and access Commission information and records.

Once a FOIA request is received, it is assigned a distinct tracking number. The Commission updates and posts the FOIA tracking log on our website to allow requesters clear visibility on the receipt of their request. The tracking log details the date the request is received along with an anticipated response date of no later than 20 working days. If the Commission has any questions or needs further clarification about the request, a member of our FOIA team immediately reaches out to the FOIA requester. The Commission also notifies the requester of any search or copy charges that apply and offers the requester the option to receive the response electronically or via hard copy. Once the response is sent out, the Commission’s tracking log is updated to reflect the action taken, the date the response was sent out, and how many days it took for the Commission to respond.

The entire Commission works to identify proactive disclosures and any identified records are reviewed for approval by the General Counsel and the Chief FOIA Officer. Once approved, the records are then posted or released as appropriate. The contents of all dockets, apart from certain items designated as nonpublic by submitters, are available for inspection on the Commission's website. The nonpublic records are clearly identified on the public website and are usually posted in redacted form. The United States Postal Service (USPS) and other filers must provide specific justification for nonpublic treatment of the items to be so designated. Any person may petition the Commission for access to specified nonpublic records, or else may petition to have the access restrictions lifted entirely.

The Commission also began a comprehensive review and revision of its FOIA regulations in line with the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, and will be opening a rule-making docket to elicit public comment on the revised regulations. The Commission immediately implemented the “Rule of 3” for frequently requested records (i.e. the Commission makes available to the public, in electronic format, records that have been requested three or more times.)

To ensure smooth operation and timely processing our FOIA team meets weekly to assess workload and response time, and to discuss any issues that may be pending. During these

weekly assessments, process improvements are discussed to keep response times within the statutory time limits for all requests. Effective communication among departments at the Commission and timely response by Commission employees to requests for records ensure that the Commission responds to all requests in an efficient and effective manner.

The Commission is committed to making its records and communications channels more electronically accessible. A webform for members of the public to submit comments is featured on the Commission's website. In response to requests from the public, the Commission improved the search function for its website, with an updated search engine that supplements the more complex search system used by frequent users of the site with more user friendly options for the general public. The Commission requires that all correspondence and legal documents filed with the Commission be processed with Optical Character Recognition (OCR), and thus are both electronically keyword searchable and compliant with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

To further promote transparency in publicly accessible records, the Commission publishes detailed monthly updates to the Consumer Price Index calculations relating to the price cap on Market Dominant postal products. This is a valuable resource for the mailing industry and the public. In addition, the Commission publishes a frequently updated summary of Negotiated Service Agreements (contracts between the USPS and private companies for special mailing agreements) and the Mail Classification Schedule. The Commission also regularly posts budgetary and administrative information, such as the annual Congressional Budget Justifications.

The Commission holds periodic public meetings and technical conferences. The meetings are publicly webcast and the recordings of these meetings are archived on the Commission's public website. Technical conferences are usually webcast and archived on the website. The Commission successfully piloted a video webcast of a technical meeting in October 2016, and is exploring the option of offering both audio and video webcast options for all public meetings in an effort to promote the commitment to openness and transparency for all public materials released by the Commission.

The Commission is proud of its open approach to the valuable records related to its mission in service to the American people. The FOIA team works hard to ensure that the Commission has a model FOIA program reflective of the fundamental commitment of open government.