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April 28, 2026

**VIA ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION**

Army Records Management Directorate

9301 Chapek Road., Bldg. 1458

Fort Belvoir, VA 22060

**RE: Freedom of Information Act Request**

Dear Sir or Madam:

On behalf of Public Citizen, Inc., and pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, I request copies of the following records concerning the reported visit by Robert James Ritchie (publicly known as “Kid Rock”) and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, on Monday, April 27, 2026, during which the two reportedly flew aboard two AH-64 Apache helicopters operating from the installation:

The flight plan(s), flight log(s), mission authorization document(s), and crew and passenger manifest(s) for any AH-64 Apache helicopter that landed at, departed from, or operated at Fort Belvoir on April 27, 2026 carrying Sec. Hegseth and Mr. Ritchie.

If it is your position that responsive records exist but that those records (or portions of those records) are exempt from disclosure, please identify the records that are being withheld and state the basis for the denial for each record being withheld. In addition, please note that Public Citizen seeks each record *in its entirety*. Accordingly, please provide all nonexempt portions of the records, without redacting portions of any record as “non-responsive,” “out of scope,” or the like.

I request that any records produced in response to this request be provided in electronic form wherever possible.

Public Citizen requests that all fees in connection with this FOIA request be waived in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) because Public Citizen does not seek the records for a commercial purpose and disclosure “is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government.” The requested records would shed light on the use of Department of Defense personnel, taxpayer-funded combat aircraft, and federal installation resources to provide a recreational flight to a private celebrity in the company of the Secretary of Defense; on whether the standard two-pilot crew complement for the AH-64 was deviated from in order to seat civilians in the

gunner's station; on whether civilians were permitted aboard armed Army aircraft and pursuant to what authorizations or waivers; and on whether public funds and federal property were used to confer a personal benefit on a political ally of President Trump. The Fort Belvoir public-affairs office has referred press inquiries to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the records sought are not otherwise publicly available. The use of military assets and personnel by the Secretary of Defense and questions of military aviation oversight are subjects of demonstrated and continuing interest to a broad audience of journalists, members of Congress, taxpayers, military-affairs researchers, and the general public, as evidenced by the sustained national press coverage of the visit and the related March 2026 incident involving Apache helicopters and Mr. Ritchie's Nashville-area residence.<sup>1</sup>

Public Citizen is a nonprofit research, litigation, and advocacy organization that represents the public interest before Congress, the executive branch, and the courts. Public Citizen has considerable expertise in the issues relevant to this records request — including federal ethics, conflicts of interest in the executive branch, the use of federal resources for private benefit, and government transparency. Public Citizen's Trump Accountability project has produced extensive research and public commentary on conflicts of interest involving the Trump administration and on the use of federal resources to benefit Trump-aligned individuals and businesses.<sup>2</sup>

Public Citizen does not have a commercial interest in the requested records.

Public Citizen has a strong record of effectively conveying information to the public, including information obtained through Public Citizen's use of FOIA, and Public Citizen intends to share the information received from this request with the public free of charge. Public Citizen distributes information through its website,<sup>3</sup> Facebook,<sup>4</sup> Bluesky,<sup>5</sup> and email listservs. It also

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<sup>1</sup>See, e.g., Ryan Grim, *Scoop: Kid Rock flew to Fort Belvoir this morning on his private jet and took a little joy ride on 2 Apache helicopters with War Secretary Pete Hegseth*, X (Apr. 27, 2026), [x.com/ryangrim/status/2048847394641412290](https://x.com/ryangrim/status/2048847394641412290); Hafiz Rashid, *WTF Was Kid Rock Doing on an Apache Helicopter With Pete Hegseth?*, New Republic (Apr. 27, 2026), [newrepublic.com/post/209569/kid-rock-apache-helicopter-pete-hegseth](https://newrepublic.com/post/209569/kid-rock-apache-helicopter-pete-hegseth); *Kid Rock scores ride in Apache helicopter with Trump defense chief: Army sources*, AlterNet (Apr. 27, 2026), [alternet.org/kid-rock-helicopter/](https://alternet.org/kid-rock-helicopter/).

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., Public Citizen, *Banquet of Greed: Trump Ballroom Donors Feast on Federal Funds and Favors* (Nov. 2025), [citizen.org/article/banquet-of-greed-trump-ballroom-donors-feast-on-federal-funds-and-favors/](https://citizen.org/article/banquet-of-greed-trump-ballroom-donors-feast-on-federal-funds-and-favors/) (analyzing federal contracts, dropped enforcement actions, and policy benefits flowing to corporate and individual donors to a Trump-directed White House project); Public Citizen, *Trump Administration Finally Discloses White House Ballroom Funding Contract in Response to Public Citizen's FOIA Lawsuit* (Apr. 22, 2026), [citizen.org/news/trump-administration-finally-discloses-white-house-ballroom-funding-contract-in-response-to-public-citizens-foia-lawsuit/](https://citizen.org/news/trump-administration-finally-discloses-white-house-ballroom-funding-contract-in-response-to-public-citizens-foia-lawsuit/); Public Citizen & Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, *We Can Trump-Proof the Presidency: Executive Branch Ethics Laws That Require Immediate Fixes*, [citizen.org/news/we-can-trump-proof-the-presidency-executive-branch-ethics-laws-that-require-immediate-fixes/](https://citizen.org/news/we-can-trump-proof-the-presidency-executive-branch-ethics-laws-that-require-immediate-fixes/).

<sup>3</sup>See [citizen.org](https://citizen.org).

<sup>4</sup>See [facebook.com/publiccitizen](https://facebook.com/publiccitizen) (Public Citizen's Facebook page). Public Citizen's Facebook page has more than 145,000 followers.

<sup>5</sup>See [bsky.app/profile/did:plc:mt3o2cf5fqpyqbyalwkegzef](https://bsky.app/profile/did:plc:mt3o2cf5fqpyqbyalwkegzef) (Public Citizen's Bluesky page). Public Citizen's Bluesky page has more than 69,000 followers.

maintains multiple blogs,<sup>6</sup> publishes a bi-monthly newspaper,<sup>7</sup> and issues frequent press releases.<sup>8</sup> Many of Public Citizen's reports, petitions, or other research products grab headlines in major newspapers, broadcast media, social media, and academic journals.<sup>9</sup> Nearly every day, print and broadcast media around the world mention Public Citizen or quote its experts.<sup>10</sup> Public Citizen also makes its experts available to speak to the media, to speak at conferences, and to testify before Congress.

Accordingly, I request that you waive all fees for locating and duplicating the requested records because Public Citizen is entitled to a public interest fee waiver. If, however, a waiver is not granted, please advise me of the amount of any proposed search, review, and reproduction charges before you conduct those activities.

Public Citizen further requests expedited processing of this request pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(E) and the Department's implementing regulations. A compelling need exists on at least two independent grounds. First, Public Citizen is "primarily engaged in disseminating information," as established by the record of public dissemination described above, and there is an urgency to inform the public concerning actual federal-government activity. Second, this request concerns a matter of widespread and exceptional national media interest in which there exist possible questions about the government's integrity that affect public confidence: the Secretary of Defense's reported use of armed Army combat aircraft to provide a recreational flight to a private celebrity—under circumstances in which the standard two-pilot crew complement reportedly was waived to seat civilians in the gunner's station—has been the subject of sustained coverage by major national news outlets, has prompted public statements from Members of Congress and at least one governor,<sup>11</sup> and follows by less than a month a separate

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<sup>6</sup>See, e.g., Public Citizen: Consumer Law & Policy Blog, [clpblog.citizen.org](http://clpblog.citizen.org).

<sup>7</sup>See, e.g., Public Citizen News, November/December 2025, [citizen.org/wp-content/uploads/Nov-PC-News-2025-final.pdf](http://citizen.org/wp-content/uploads/Nov-PC-News-2025-final.pdf).

<sup>8</sup>See Public Citizen, Press Releases, [citizen.org/news/type/press/](http://citizen.org/news/type/press/).

<sup>9</sup>See, e.g., Mikella Schuettler, *White-Collar Enforcement Sinks Under Trump, Group Says*, Bloomberg (Jan. 15, 2026), [bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-01-15/white-collar-enforcement-sinks-under-trump-public-citizen-says](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-01-15/white-collar-enforcement-sinks-under-trump-public-citizen-says); Jacob Gardenswartz, *Trump promised to 'drill, baby, drill.' But Americans' gas costs are up, new report finds*, Scripps News (Dec. 16, 2025), [scrippsnews.com/politics/trump-promised-to-drill-baby-drill-but-americans-gas-costs-are-up-new-report-finds](https://www.scrippsnews.com/politics/trump-promised-to-drill-baby-drill-but-americans-gas-costs-are-up-new-report-finds); Jonathan Edwards, *Report: Donors to Trump's White House ballroom have \$279B in federal contracts*, Wash. Post (Nov. 3, 2025), [washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/11/03/trump-ballroom-donors-contracts-enforcement/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/11/03/trump-ballroom-donors-contracts-enforcement/); *More than 40 Trump administration picks tied directly to oil, gas and coal, analysis shows*, The Guardian (Oct. 9, 2025), [theguardian.com/us-news/2025/oct/08/trump-administration-fossil-fuels-climate](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/oct/08/trump-administration-fossil-fuels-climate).

<sup>10</sup>See, e.g., In the News, Public Citizen, [citizen.org/news/type/in-the-news/](http://citizen.org/news/type/in-the-news/).

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Jason Crow (@RepJasonCrow), X (Apr. 27, 2026), <https://x.com/RepJasonCrow/status/2048891961038278990> (post by Rep. Jason Crow, D-Colo., a member of the House Armed Services Committee and former Army Ranger, questioning Secretary Hegseth's use of taxpayer dollars to give Mr. Ritchie "joy rides" on Apache helicopters); Governor Newsom Press Office (@GovPressOffice), X (Apr. 27, 2026), <https://x.com/GovPressOffice/status/2048863356241821878> (post by the press office of California Governor Gavin Newsom questioning why taxpayers were paying to fly Mr. Ritchie aboard \$100 million helicopters)

Apache-helicopter incident involving the same private individual in which Secretary Hegseth publicly intervened to halt an ongoing Army investigation. The records sought will lose much of their value to public understanding if they are not produced promptly. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(E)(vi), I certify that the foregoing statements, and the statements made elsewhere in this letter in support of expedited processing, are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

I expect a determination as to the request for expedited processing within 10 calendar days, as required by 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(E)(ii)(I). If expedited processing is granted, please process this request as soon as practicable. If expedited processing is denied, I expect a substantive response within 20 working days as otherwise required by law. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact me by phone at (202) 804-2744 or by e-mail at [zeverson@citizen.org](mailto:zeverson@citizen.org).

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Zach Everson

On behalf of Public Citizen