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April 28, 2026

**VIA ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION**

FAA Air Traffic Organization

Eastern Service Area FOIA Coordinator

Federal Aviation Administration

**RE: Freedom of Information Act Request — URGENT: Request for Immediate Records-Retention Hold**

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 aircraft operations in the airspace of and adjacent to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, on Monday, April 27, 2026, in connection with the reported visit by Robert James Ritchie (publicly known as “Kid Rock”) and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth to Fort Belvoir on that date.

**Immediate Request for Records-Retention Hold**

Before stating the records sought, Public Citizen respectfully requests that the Federal Aviation Administration take immediate steps to preserve all responsive air traffic control voice recordings, radar data, surface-movement data, and associated operational records pending the agency’s search and processing of this request. Public Citizen understands that, pursuant to FAA Order JO 7210.3 (Facility Operation and Administration) and related agency directives, certain ATC voice recordings are routinely overwritten or destroyed approximately 45 days after capture, and certain radar and surface-movement data are retained for shorter periods. Because the records sought below were generated on April 27, 2026, they are subject to imminent destruction in the ordinary course of agency record-keeping. Public Citizen requests that the FAA immediately place a litigation/FOIA hold on all responsive recordings and data, and confirm in writing that such a hold has been implemented, so that responsive records remain available throughout the agency’s processing of this request and any administrative appeal or judicial review that may follow.

**Records Requested**

For the day of April 27, 2026, please provide:

1. All air traffic control voice recordings and audio communications, and any associated controller transcripts, involving any AH-64 Apache helicopter carrying Mr. Ritchie and

Secretary Hegseth operating in or transiting the airspace of, or adjacent to, Davison Army Airfield and Fort Belvoir, including any handoff communications between Davison Tower and Potomac TRACON, Washington ARTCC (ZDC), or other facilities.

2. All radar data, including but not limited to STARS/ARTS track data, ERAM track data, ASDE-X surface-movement data, and ASR/ARSR sensor data, reflecting the aircraft and operations described in Item 1.
3. All instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plans, flight progress strips, electronic flight strips, and flight-data records associated with the aircraft and operations described in Item 1.
4. All controller position logs, supervisor logs, watch-supervisor logs, daily operational logs, and shift-change logs from Davison Tower (KDAA), Potomac TRACON (PCT), and Washington ARTCC (ZDC) for April 27, 2026, to the extent the logs reflect any of the aircraft or operations described in Item 1.
5. Any FAA Mandatory Occurrence Reports (MOR), preliminary accident/incident reports, hotline complaints, or other safety reports received or generated by the FAA on or after April 27, 2026 concerning the aircraft or operations described in Item 1.

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. For voice recordings, please produce native-format audio files (e.g., WAV or MP3) rather than transcripts alone.

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 airspace and air traffic control resources to facilitate a recreational flight by a private celebrity in the company of the Secretary of Defense; on whether civilian air traffic was affected by the Apache flights; and on the timing, conduct, and ATC handling of the operations. 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 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 maintains multiple blogs,<sup>6</sup> publishes a bi-monthly newspaper,<sup>7</sup> and issues frequent press

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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/). The reported flight follows a March 2026 incident in which two AH-64 Apache helicopters from the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade conducted a low-altitude flight near Mr. Ritchie’s Nashville-area residence; the Army initially suspended the aircrew pending an investigation, but Secretary Hegseth publicly directed that there be “no punishment” and “no investigation,” telling the aircrew to “carry on, patriots.”

<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.

<sup>6</sup>See, e.g., Public Citizen: Consumer Law & Policy Blog, [clpblog.citizen.org](https://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](https://citizen.org/wp-content/uploads/Nov-PC-News-2025-final.pdf).

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 49 C.F.R. § 7.31. A compelling need exists on at least three 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 has been the subject of sustained coverage by major national news outlets, has prompted public statements from Members of Congress and at least one sitting governor,<sup>11</sup> and follows by less than a month a separate Apache-helicopter incident involving the same private individual in which Secretary Hegseth publicly intervened to halt an ongoing Army investigation. Third, and uniquely with respect to this request, the records sought are subject to imminent destruction in the ordinary course of FAA record-keeping: ATC voice recordings are typically overwritten or destroyed approximately 45 days after capture pursuant to FAA Order JO 7210.3, and certain radar data are retained for shorter periods. Without expedited processing, the records sought will cease to exist before the agency completes its standard 20-working-day response, depriving the public of the opportunity to evaluate the operations at issue. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(E)(vi), I certify

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

<sup>11</sup>See, e.g., Jason Crow (@RepJasonCrow), X (Apr. 27, 2026), [x.com/RepJasonCrow/status/2048891961038278990](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), [x.com/GovPressOffice/status/2048863356241821878](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).

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. Regardless of how the agency adjudicates expedited processing, I respectfully request written confirmation, within 5 business days, that the records-retention hold described above has been implemented. 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