**Uses of DC Open Government Laws**

**Fritz Mulhauser**

**Latest update: May 3, 2023**

1. **FOIA uses we’ve come across over the years**

See below examples of uses of public records by reporters, lawyers, activists, nonprofits, etc. With links to publications mentioning the records requested/denied/obtained through DC FOIA. Also authors’ contacts listed where known. Open Government Coalition uses including in blogs shown also (at end).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Email** | **Works for** | **Examples of DC FOIA uses** |
| Morgan Baskin | mbaskin@wamu.org  | WAMU/DCist | For deep account of public housing vouchers in DC and developers’ exploitation of Housing Authority payment rules to get rid of rent-controlled units and install voucher holders paying sky-high rents for “rehabbed” units, Baskin used DC FOIA to get details of many properties. 3/20/23 story [here](https://www.npr.org/local/305/2023/03/20/1164765577/the-next-hottest-rental-strategy-market-to-housing-choice-vouchers). Supported by Spotlight DC. |
| Jess Arnold | jarnold1@wusa9.com  | WUSA9 | After several incidents of DC crashes by cars with unpaid tickets, Arnold via FOIA got DC DPW records showing in 2022, DPW reported 4,202,669 unpaid citations totaling $889,187,824. Story [here](https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/dc/dc-millions-dollars-unpaid-tickets/65-9620d760-a06c-451e-b173-25125f75779b). |
| Steve Thompson  | steve.thompson@washpost.com  | Washington Post | *Post* 4/13/23 story on new D.C. Council Housing Committee chair Robert White questioning D.C. Housing Authority head Brenda Donald about her January 2023 $41,250 bonus at April 10 budget hearing. And reporting DCHA failure to answer reporter's FOIA request for records of how the bonus was authorized*Post* 2/16/23 [story](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2023/02/15/dc-housing-authority-overpays-landlords/) “D.C. overpays landlords millions to house the city’s poorest” used FOIA to get Housing Authority data on rents paid for units occupied by voucher holders. (with Dalton Bennett) |
| Dupont East Civic Action Association |  |  | Neighborhood nonprofit in 2021 requested DCRA property records (building permits, zoning) under FOIA. Agency computed fees incorrectly and denied public interest fee waiver incorrectly, according to [opinion](https://tinyurl.com/4nsk649t) by Office of Open Government in 2022. |
| Mary Levy | marylevy41@verizon.net  | Freelance consultant | Lawyer and school finance expert, and past consultant to Council committees, Levy was retained by the D.C. State Board of Education to study teacher turnover. Because of lack of accessible data she used FOIA to get some of what she needed. See 2020 report updated in 2021 at: <https://tinyurl.com/563enyse>.  |
| Amanda Michelle Gomez, Kaela Roeder | agomez@wamu.org  | DCist/WAMU | Used DCFOIA to get some of the data used in 11/16/22 [story](https://dcist.com/story/22/11/16/dc-schools-homeless-students-mckinney-vento/) on 7,000 DC school children and youth in DC who are homeless. Center for Public Integrity provided [federal data](https://publicintegrity.org/education/unhoused-and-undercounted/schools-fail-to-count-homeless-students/) on homeless youth enrollments. DC state education office distributes federal grants to aid the population. Story highlights many DC schools with lots of homeless (8 charters with over 20%) that get few or no funds; others with fewer get money.  |
| Alex Koma | akoma@[washingtoncitypaper.com](https://t.co/WLuxR8DGAK) | City Paper | Used DC FOIA to get emails for story on Elizabeth Alexander. Her consulting firm Cadogan & Associates specialized in helping new firms get off the ground, particularly if they’re looking to do business with the District government. And since July 2020, Anderson also worked for a pair of DC agencies (first DSLBD and then moved over to the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, all while working with companies and nonprofits that do business with DSLBD and other government agencies. This story was supported with funds from [Spotlight DC—Capital City Fund for Investigative Journalism](https://spotlightdc.org/). |
| Alex Koma and Sloane Airey | akoma@[washingtoncitypaper.com](https://t.co/WLuxR8DGAK) | City Paper | Used DC FOIA to get records for 5/12/23 [piece](https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/603904/failing-the-test-bowsers-promised-crime-lab-evidence-retesting-is-nowhere-to-be-seen-despite-years-of-work/) on DC Dep’t of Forensic Sciences, especially a plan to re-test evidence from large number of past cases. Promised a while ago but not yet under way, and the reporting explores why not. Needed in light of questions of quality of work raised in a small set of cases in last few years, leading to lost accreditation. Again supported by Spotlight DC..  |
| Electronic Privacy Information Center | Ben Winters, Sr. Counsel, winters@epic.org; Virginia Eubanks, 2022 EPIC Scholar-in-Residence; <https://twitter.com/PopTechWorks>  |  | Fifty-page [report](https://epic.org/screened-scored-in-dc/) *Screened and Scored in DC* issued 11/1/22 describes 14-month study of automated decision-making in DC government agencies in areas such as public benefits, healthcare, policing, and housing. “DC residents are surveilled, screened, and scored every day. But because of weak government transparency laws, opaque procurement processes, the power and influence of tech vendors, and the decline in local journalism,” details are unknown. Based on many DC FOIA requests. Responses from six in DC (plus federal Dep’t of Veterans Affairs) [posted](https://epic.org/screened-scored-in-dc/); four still not answered at publication. |
| Eric Flack | <https://twitter.com/ericflacktv>  | WUSA9 TV | Did [story](https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/education/school-security-dcps-security-cameras-uvalde-safety-repair-backlog/65-d4091a94-56cf-4fac-b6f4-9d19c603d353) 9/21/22 on large number of broken DCPS school security cameras. Based on list obtained by FOIA (Flack told me, not mentioned in piece).  |
| Casey Parks | <https://www.linkedin.com/in/casey-parks-a7552875/> and <https://twitter.com/caseyparks>  | Washington Post | Wrote 7/17/22 [story](https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/07/17/casa-ruby-programs-close/) of financial problems at Casa Ruby, an LGBTQ nonprofit in DC that received almost $10 million in public funds for a shelter and other programs. Sources included thousands of emails to and from one of the funders, D.C. Department of Human Services, which declined to renew an $839,000 grant last fall. Founder, Ruby Corado, believed to be in to El Salvador; DC AG filed [legal action](https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/08/01/casa-ruby-ruby-corado-dc-attorney-general/) to freeze accounts, install financial overseer.  |
| Martin Austermuhle  | [martin.austermuhle@gmail.com](https://mail.aol.com/webmail-std/en-us/suite) | WAMU | FOIA gave him basis for [Tweet](https://twitter.com/i/redirect?url=https%3A%2F%2Ftwitter.com%2Fmaustermuhle%2Fstatus%2F1522633975981821954%3Fcxt%3DHBwWhMCy1ZXivaEqAAAA%26cn%3DZmxleGlibGVfcmVjcw%253D%253D%26refsrc%3Demail&t=1+1651901158973&cn=ZmxleGlibGVfcmVjcw%3D%3D&sig=9b6c66f3f52567480ffd43e3af3a7f0b8cc0c31e&iid=8223b824cc6d49f9988fd709035e6a3c&uid=1895902639&nid=244+281088001) in May 2022 on mayor’s six-figure expense of public money for glossy mailing just weeks before primary election in her race for 3rd term. Axios got the same, also by FOIA. Their story [here](https://www.axios.com/local/washington-dc/2022/05/06/bowser-mailer-cost-taxpayers-130k?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Editorial+and+Events&utm_campaign=822b6e0d2c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2022_05_09_04_22&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_612a4959fd-822b6e0d2c-402924321).Many requests in earlier years. Multiple stories on attempts to uncover details of secret DC bid for Amazon HQ; one in 2018 [here](https://wamu.org/story/18/01/17/found-d-c-s-bid-amazon-hq2-didnt/). |
| Save Connecticut Ave. |  |  | Group aims to stop a plan for bike lanes on Conn . Ave. A major antagonist is the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA). Their website [reported](https://saveconnecticutave.org/f/how-the-bike-lobby-captured-the-ancs) July 12, 2022, that a “recent FOIA request resulted in the District being ordered to share thousands of emails between its elected and DDOT officials and WABA staff.”  |
| ICE Out of DC Coalition |  |  | In June 2022 a group of civil rights organizations known as the ICE Out of DC Coalition [published a report](https://www.flipsnack.com/justfutures/dc-law-enforcement-surveillance-technology/full-view.html) — based on documents obtained through public records requests as well as public sources — mapping out many of the capital region’s law enforcement surveillance agencies and technologies. |
| Drew Harwell | drew.harwell@washpost.com  | WaPo | Records obtained by Electronic Frontier Foundation used in [11/10/21 Post story](https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/11/10/data-broker-shared-billions-phone-location-records-with-dc-government-part-covid-tracking-effort/) on data broker Veraset sharing billions of “highly sensitive” raw phone location records with the D.C. Dep’t of Health for six months in 2020. Unclear if phone users knew of company uses of the data. Data sources unknown (which apps the company collected from). Showed how people moved about the city during the pandemic. (Part of “free trial” offer from company. DC did not pursue.) Emails show that the shared data was authorized for coronavirus-tracking purposes only and did not include names or other details. EFF researchers said they found no evidence the data was misused. |
| Lilah Burke |  | DCist/WAMU | Used FOIA to get data on deaths of unhoused persons in 2021. Compiled by D.C. Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. [Story](https://dcist.com/story/22/02/16/unhoused-people-dc-deaths-decrease-2021/) 2/16/22 in DCist. |
| Ally Schweitzer |  | DCist/WAMU | From DC gov’t, used data via FOIA on applications for STAY DC rent relief funds for August 2021 [DCist story](https://dcist.com/story/21/07/31/stay-dc-help-clinics-for-tenants/) on delays and hardships, plus official scramble with sign-up clinics to commit federal funds before September 30. |
| John Harden | john.harden@washpost.com  | Washington Post | Massive data on five years of traffic and parking enforcement in DC, by neighborhood, and effects on low income drivers who can’t pay. Post [story 8/21](https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/08/06/dc-traffic-parking-tickets-black-neighborhoods/). Some data obtained by FOIA.  |
| Washington Teachers Union | joeweedon@gmail.com  |  | Union used FOIA to get records of $23 million in HVAC upgrades claimed had been spent by DCPS to prepare school ventilation and filtering for reopening during COVID-19 period. (Assisted by Coalition.) Used in testimony September 2021. |
| Perry Stein | perry.stein@washpost.com  | Washington Post | Racial and neighborhood disparities in admissions at selective DC high school, School Without Walls, for fall 2021, explored with data from FOIA request. 8/27/21 story [here](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/school-without-walls-admissions-test-diversity/2021/08/27/6959cec2-0293-11ec-a664-4f6de3e17ff0_story.html).Again exploring neighborhood differences in middle school children seeking places in application high school Banneker via FOIA to DCPS. A-section front page [story](https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/04/25/dc-middle-schools-mayor-bowser/) 4/25/22.  |
| Matin Austermuhle | [martin.austermuhle@gmail.com](https://mail.aol.com/webmail-std/en-us/suite),  | WAMU/DCist. Intercept | Inadvertent transparency (outside the law): In April, WAMU’s Martin Austermuhle [reported](https://dcist.com/story/21/04/27/cyberpunks-allegedly-steal-large-amounts-of-d-c-police-data-in-ransomware-attack/) a ransomware attack on MPD by a group called Babuk. It resulted in the hacking of 250 gigabytes of police data. Reveal gained access to the entire data trove through [DDoSecrets](https://ddosecrets.com/wiki/Distributed_Denial_of_Secrets%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), a transparency nonprofit made up of journalists and technologists unaffiliated with the hack. Reveal found police misconduct investigations and disciplinary decisions buried in tens of thousands of records that included a gang database, intelligence briefs on right-wing activists, and emails about a police unit intended to suppress robberies. Chris Gelardi wrote these up in a June 2021 Intercept [piece](https://theintercept.com/2021/06/18/dc-police-gang-database-hacked-emails/). The ransomware hack contained thousands of scanned documents that were not readily searchable. Reveal converted those documents to text and searched for files that referenced officers potentially engaged in a “criminal or quasi-criminal offense,” language taken from MPD’s General Orders. Austermuhle and colleagues at DCist/WAMU [wrote](https://dcist.com/story/21/12/18/dc-police-panel-blocked-mpd-firings/) in December 2021 about 75 cases from the hacked data, in which the department investigated a current officer for criminal misconduct and 24 proposed terminations. Only three were removed, after internal review boards reduced the proposed discipline.   |
| Public Defender Service | cgelardi@protonmail.com  |  | PDS in 2021 used FOIA to get two batches of MPD records of a gang database. The database had earlier been subject to a data hack (and Chris Gelardi’s *Intercept* [story](https://theintercept.com/2021/06/18/dc-police-gang-database-hacked-emails/) in June 2021, noted above in this list). The PDS shared its new findings with Defund MPD, a coalition of D.C. organizations formed during the 2020 police brutality protests, which shared the records with *The Intercept*. The Intercept [story](https://theintercept.com/2022/01/09/dc-police-gang-database-mpd/) on the data by Chris Gelardi was published January 9, 2022. |
| Luz Lazo | luz.lazo@washpost.com  | Washington Post  | Used DC DMV records via FOIA in October 2020 [report](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/maryland-and-virginia-drivers-owe-dc-more-than-370-million-in-outstanding-traffic-and-parking-fines/2020/10/04/c11a1df6-030c-11eb-b7ed-141dd88560ea_story.html) about $373 million in DC tickets unpaid by Maryland and Virginia residents.Another Post [story](https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2023/05/02/dc-traffic-tickets-driving-penalties/) 5/2/23 also on unpaid fines as part of weak traffic safety enforcement, following up on incident where three deaths resulted from March 2023 Rock Creek crash by vehicle with 49 unpaid fines. (Reporters used TV video of license to link to unpaid fine data.) Overall, millions of tickets, billions in fines. Data came from public (posted) data but also multiple FOIA requests for raw data and extracts from databases. By Luz Lazo and Emily Davies. |
| Paul Schwartzman | paul.schwartzman@washpost.com  | Washington Post | From DC Attorney General, used FOIA to get records of more than 70 lawsuits alleging police misconduct and negligence that the city has settled since 2016. Total outlay $40 million. [Story 12/20](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/dc-police-lawsuits/2020/12/24/e986472c-2375-11eb-8672-c281c7a2c96e_story.html). |
| Council for Court Excellence |  |  | DC nonprofit was sub-grantee of DC Justice Lab to conduct research on behalf of their Unlock the Box Coalition, focused on limiting the use of solitary confinement in the District. CCE’s pro bono partners at Squire Patton Boggs used FOIA in July 2021 requesting data from DC Department of Corrections related to solitary confinement/restrictive housing. Legislation will be the product. |
| Council for Court Excellence |  |  | CCE used FOIA in work on a DC Justice System Overview due in 2022. A pro-bono team at Wiley Rein is analyzing data on compassionate release gained via federal FOIA request to Bureau of Prisons. The GW Law School Public Justice Advocacy Clinic, led by Prof. Jeffrey Gutman, is representing CCE in an appeal of a federal FOIA denial by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for DC. The GW Law School Prisoner and Reentry Clinic, led by Professor Jessica Steinberg, also did FOIA requests to DC agencies. |
| Mike Eckel | EckelM@rferl.com  | Radio Free Europe | Used FOIA to get autopsy of deceased Russian dissident Mikhail Lesin. Died in DuPont Circle hotel room in 2015. Files released in 2019 after court battle (Davis Wright Tremaine media law firm represented RFE.) Official finding of “accidental” death questioned by many; autopsy details undercut that conclusion. March 2019 RFE story [here.](https://www.rferl.org/a/lesin-autopsy-record/29824566.html) In March 2018, [the website BuzzFeed](https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/jasonleopold/christopher-steele-mikhail-lesin-murder-putin-fbi#.nsE6MXmQD)quoted unnamed sources as saying that former British intelligence officer Christopher Steele had given the FBI a report stating that Lesin was bludgeoned to death by enforcers working for an oligarch close to Putin. DC Medical Examiner unwritten policy of denying FOIA requests for death investigations spilled into public in 2021 with their proposed legislation that would codify the practice, withdrawing autopsies from DC FOIA coverage (and allow access only by court order). Coalition wrote strong opposing statement and testified twice. Reporters Committee sent opposing letter twice. Bill passed. See Coalition blog [here.](https://dcogc.org/blog/d-c-council-should-reject-medical-examiner-secrecy-proposal-says-open-government-coalition/) |
| Andrew Giambrone |  | Now in NY but still working in DC part time for WAMU | December 2019 [story for DCLine](https://thedcline.org/2019/12/19/jack-evans-received-a-long-list-of-developers-from-eaglebank-while-the-bank-was-his-client/) on Council member Jack Evans. Based on 2016 records obtained by FOIA showing banker introducing Evans to D.C. real estate developers. As Evans was building consulting business.  |
| Amanda Michelle Gomez | agomez@washingtoncitypaper.com  | City Paper | Emails used as basis of [story](https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/322277/emails-raise-suspicions-as-to-whether-the-bowser-administration-delayed-and-finessed-covid-19-data-before-moving-into-phase-two/) 9/12/20 exploring concerns that Mayor Bowser staff were manipulating release of Corona virus data. The emails were released as part of a FOIA request made by Allison Hrabar, a resident who tracks the DC coronavirus dashboard and shares her observations on Twitter. She shared the results of her FOIA request, which runs more than 1,000 pages, with *City Paper*.  Hrabar’s [Twitter thread](https://twitter.com/allisongeroi/status/1304435525563154433) on her FOIA request prompted strong reactions. Some accused the mayor’s office of deception. The emails provide further insight into why data related to community spread was scrubbed from the dashboard on June 20, [as first reported by *DCist*](https://dcist.com/story/20/06/20/dc-phase-2-june-22-but-key-covid19-metrics-not-met/). |
| Cuneyt Dil | cuneyt@axios.com | Freelance. Seen mostly in daily aggregator, DC Line. Now “Town Talker” columnist, AxiosDC | *Wash. City Paper* 2020 [story](https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/303753/waste-mismanagement-how-the-district-loses-millions-on-garbage-disposal/) on DC DPW trash transfer stations that lose money--charging trash-hauling users less than costs to run the transfer spots and hauling to Lorton incinerator. FOIA helped get details on maze of contracts, DPW policies, past evaluations and research. Another project of Spotlight DC: Capitol City Fund for Investigative Journalism.. |
| Justin Wm. Moyer | justin.moyer@washpost.com  | Washington Post | Homeless woman Alice Carter died unremarked. Moyer’s Post [December 2019 story](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/shes-just-one-more-missing-voice-dc-says-117-homeless-people-died-here-this-year/2019/12/20/8dfec686-21b9-11ea-86f3-3b5019d451db_story.html) used FOIA to review all other homeless deaths. Second [piece](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-homeless-deaths/2020/12/30/e94d74fc-453e-11eb-8deb-b948d0931c16_story.html) 12/30/20 reporting 180 deaths in 2020 of those with homelessness, based again on Medical Examiner records via FOIA.  |
| Mitch Ryals  | mryals@washingtoncitypaper.com  | City Paper former “Loose Lips” columnist then in 2021 managing editor | [Report 9/2/21](https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/529957/mpd-keeps-investigations-into-fatal-use-of-force-secret-despite-chiefs-promise/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Editorial+and+Events&utm_campaign=cd53b73b56-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_09_03_03_39&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_612a4959fd-cd53b73b56-402924321) in City Paper on unsuccessful FOIA request for investigations of officer-involved shootings. Updates on how this contradicts chief’s pledge of transparency, DC Auditor findings that investigations aren’t that great anyway, plus new Council bills to open more records.City Paper [story](https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/308805/d-c-office-of-police-complaints-records-leave-much-to-be-desired/) (September 2020) on Office of Police Complaints denial of FOIA request for complaint records on all officers named in mandatory release (summer 2020) of names of those involved in serious uses of force since body cams started in 2014-15.According to a March 9, 2022, [piece](https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/550645/hsema-director-chris-rodriguez-accused-of-age-and-racial-discrimination/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Editorial+and+Events&utm_campaign=871e7fb3ea-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2022_03_09_03_38&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_612a4959fd-871e7fb3ea-402924321) in *City Paper,* Ryals tried unsuccessfully to use DC FOIA to get records of internal personnel investigation of DC Homeland Security & Emergency Management director Chris Rodriguez. Reporting prompted by Rodriguez unexplained disappearance from mayoral COVID-19 briefings. See below under *Washington Post* for Ryals involvement in Trayon White video. See [2019 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/article/21062003/mpd-officer-in-terrence-sterling-death-is-showing-a-pattern-of-expletives-and-aggressive-behavior) on new complaints against Officer Jordan Palmer (chase car driver in Terrence Sterling pursuit and death); Office of Police Complaints denied records (which we OGC followed up by our own FOIA and showed that was incorrect response by agency). |
| Morgan Baskin | morganbaskin@gmail.com  | Formerly Washington City Paper (housing); later freelancing | [March 2019 story](https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/181393/dgs-chief-knew-in-2017-that-shelters-were-three-months-behind-schedule-emails-show/); exposed delays by DGS contractors in building new homeless shelters; also [2018 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/housing-complex/article/21009575/construction-debacle-jeopardizes-homeless-shelter-replacement-plan) on similar delays. Super April [2019 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/article/21063869/to-escape-court-oversight-dcs-child-welfare-system-is-cutting-corners) on Child & Family Services Agency based on two years of research including FOIA. |
| [2020 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/coronavirus/article/21122957/dcs-child-protective-services-agency-doesnt-yet-have-protective-equipment-for-its-social-workers) in City Paper on problems in Child & Family Services during virus. FOIA use to get details on delays in obtaining protective gear.[DCist 2020 story](https://dcist.com/story/20/09/30/dc-public-housing-authority-safety-violence-lawsuit-2019-notices/) on DC Housing Authority response to safety on their properties. Emails obtained via FOIA show officials were told of problems earlier than they acknowledged. |
| Rachel Cohen  | rmc031@gmail.com  | Freelance; City Paper and others | Charter school issues. [2018 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/article/21006459/behind-the-consulting-firm-raking-in-millions-from-dc-charter-schools) on insider-run TenSquare consulting company making money off failing charters; [2018 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/article/21026696/dcs-master-facilities-plan-will-shape-the-citys-balance-between-neighborhood-schools-and-charters) on charters keeping secret the facility survey data required by law for school planning (using records obtained by FOIA by Fritz); [2018 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/article/21002438/the-dc-public-charter-school-board-didnt-intervene-in-a-financially-troubled-school) on charter board not acting on fiscal problems of a school and delaying closing.October 2020 City Paper [story](https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/415407/workers-compensation-in-d-c-separate-and-unequal/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Editorial+and+Events&utm_campaign=7471daaf51-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_10_08_03_28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_612a4959fd-7471daaf51-402924321) on DC government workers’ compensation, with FOIA used to get data comparing that with DC private sector employees’ program. Funded by DC Spotlight. |
| Joshua Kaplan  | Joshua.Kaplan@propublica.org  | Now (11/20) in NYC; formerly freelancing in DC | <https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/181902/why-did-dc-end-an-innovative-program-to-treat-opioid-addiction/> on DC drug abuse treatment and [this](https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/180880/a-city-van-claiming-to-help-heroin-users-went-missing-then-dc-covered-it-up/) in [April](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/article/21063348/a-city-van-claiming-to-help-heroin-users-went-missing-then-dc-covered-it-up) 2019 on city drug abuse treatment van found abandoned yet contractor kept getting paid. |
| Terrence McCoy | Terrence.McCoy@washpost.com  | Washington Post | FOIA-based [story in 2018](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/many-children-have-been-poisoned-by-lead-in-homes-approved-by-dc-housing-inspectors/2018/08/14/5633a144-9b24-11e8-8d5e-c6c594024954_story.html?utm_term=.436673020e3a) on DC Housing Authority failure to inspect for lead paint in apartments rented with government vouchers.  |
| Marina Marraco (Fox 5); Peter Jamison and Peter Hermann (Post) | Marina.Marraco@FoxTV.com; Peter.Jamison@Washpost.com; Peter.Hermann@Washpost.com  | Fox5 and Washington Post | Press forced mayor to acknowledge firing a staffer who had been quietly let go after acting badly while drunk in Wilson Building after hours. Records finally coughed up under FOIA pressure. Marraco initial Tweet [here](https://twitter.com/MarinaMarraco/status/1022572290792452096); Post story [here](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/employee-of-dc-mayors-office-fired-after-violent-fracas-at-city-hall/2018/07/26/8190a80a-9115-11e8-8322-b5482bf5e0f5_story.html?utm_term=.aa99ab4bcfcb). |
| Paul Wagner | Paul.Wagner@FoxTV.com  | Retired 2020 from decades of Fox5 TV reporting | Pursued body worn camera video of MPD stops of drivers prosecuted for DWI where video was shown at trial. MPD denied FOIA. We OGC got AG Racine to reverse when we argued records shown in court must be public under other legal rules (requiring “public trials”). See his s[tory in 2016](https://www.fox5dc.com/news/dc-police-turn-over-body-cam-footage-used-in-court-hides-identities-of-cops-and-suspects) on getting only redacted video (before our success getting unredacted video). Wagner has for decades used DC FOIA.  |
| Will Sommer | will.sommer@thedailybeast.com  | Formerly City Paper (Loose Lips); now Daily Beast | [2014 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/loose-lips/blog/13134868/yes-jack-evans-vandalized-his-own-wikipedia-page) used Council email to show Jack Evans messing with Wikipedia postings and edits unflattering to his 2014 mayoral race; [2015 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/loose-lips/blog/13135400/bowser-administration-courts-pigskins-with-nats-tickets-but-no-snyder-meeting-yet) on Bowser’s behind the scenes flattery and courting of Redskins to return to DC, while publicly demanding name change. |
| Jason Cherkis | Email unknown but maybe DM @jasoncherkis | Formerly City Paper; then Huffington Post until laid off | [2011 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/blog/13063242/emails-show-d-c-struggling-with-homeless-shelter-capacity) on DC agencies struggling to locate winter housing for homeless. Doubtless more. may recall good items from his DC days.  |
| Jessica Sidman | jsidman@washingtonian.com  | Formerly City Paper; now Washingtonian | [2015 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/food/blog/20678805/fig-olive-gives-partial-answers-about-food-prepared-at-new-york-commissary) from DC Health Dept records on food prep issues in high end Fig & Olive restaurant  |
| Jonetta Barras | jonetta@jonettarosebarras.com  | Formerly City Paper; now columnist at DCLine | [1995 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/article/13008253/soporific-secrets) exposing Office of Campaign Finance failure to investigate political fundraising committees including Mayor Barry. April 2019 [opinion piece](https://thedcline.org/2019/04/30/jonetta-rose-barras-are-charter-school-leaders-ignoring-dc-laws/) on charter leaders’ disregard of suicide prevention statute passed by Council, using internal emails obtained by FOIA with devastating effect.Multi-part series in DC Line December 2021 on child deaths and shortcomings of DC child welfare system. Two segments [here](https://thedcline.org/2021/12/21/children-at-risk-32-years-and-billions-of-dollars-later-dc-fails-to-protect-thousands-from-abuse-and-neglect/) and [here](https://thedcline.org/2021/12/23/children-at-risk-abuse-and-neglect-investigations-are-opened-too-late-and-closed-too-soon/) on Child and Family Services Agency, one on Child Fatality Review Commission in DC Medical Examiner office. Multiple FOIA requests used. Funded by DC Spotlight. |
| Alan Suderman | asuderman@ap.org  | Formerly City Paper (Loose Lips); now at AP | [2012 story](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/loose-lips/blog/13133539/not-our-problem) on contractors defrauding DC  |
| Valerie Jablow | wolbajenroh@earthlink.net | DC education blogger | [2019 blog post](https://educationdc.net/2019/04/17/what-is-the-plan-for-banneker-high-schools-current-building-or-conflicts-of-interest-and-the-middle-school-program/) on problems of planning for Banneker HS; [2019 blog post](https://educationdc.net/2019/04/08/just-tell-me-who-owns-this/) on search for details of ownership of St Coletta’s school |
| Liz Koenig | elizcarter@gmail.com  | Charter teacher, open gov’t activist | Used FOIA to get records from Charter Board; [posted on Twitter](https://twitter.com/dcteachersunite/status/1089362846079741952); testified throughout 2018-19 on charter transparency based on experiences at her own school; fired from her teaching job. See [2019 City Paper account](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/article/21047643/bridges-public-charter-school-dismisses-wellloved-teacher-who-spoke-out) of her FOIA use and FOIA activism, by Rachel Cohen. |
| Steve Thompson | steve.thompson@washpost.com  | Washington Post | [2019 story](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/in-business-proposals-dc-council-member-jack-evans-pitched-influence-to-legal-and-lobby-firms/2019/03/01/1f990d50-3aa6-11e9-a06c-3ec8ed509d15_story.html?utm_term=.1581fdc2170f) on Jack Evans’s solicitation of outside work – beginning of his difficulties leading to losing committee chairmanship. Based on FOIA for emails from Council account. Jack Evans’s fall may be the biggest DC FOIA story in recent months.  |
| Alejandra Matos, Emma Brown | Emma.brown@washpost.com  | Washington Post (Matos was an intern; now gone) | DCPS high schools’ records via FOIA were basis for strong [2017 story](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/some-dc-high-schools-reported-only-a-small-fraction-of-suspensions/2017/07/17/045c387e-5762-11e7-ba90-f5875b7d1876_story.html?utm_term=.682427a99168) on false record keeping to hide continuing use of suspension, though against policy.  |
| Fenit Nirappil | Fenit.Nirappil@washpost.com  | Washington Post | [2018 story](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/what-a-dc-lawmakers-inbox-looks-like-after-saying-the-rothschilds-control-the-climate/2018/04/15/665fd49e-3d90-11e8-974f-aacd97698cef_story.html?utm_term=.4efb608393dc) about Council member Trayon White supporters and critics based on email from Council account via FOIA, after White’s public comments about “Rothchilds controlling the climate.” |
| Amy Phillips | Aphillips@pdsdc.org  | PDS attorney | Sued under FOIA to challenge denial by MPD of records from police office discipline trial board. (Useful in future PDS defense work as officers had testified admitting unlawful actions.) Trial had been entirely public. After several years (and court closing for COVID) she dismissed this case, 2019-CA-0004054. She then filed in federal court with charge that MPD blacklisted some requesters who had criticized MPD, at Chief Peter Newsham’s direction. Then-FOIA Officer, Vendette Parker, explained in sworn declaration included in complaint how chief’s staffer directed her, between 2017 when she came to the FOIA office and the end of 2019, to delay, deny, or improperly alter about 20 requests pursuant to the chief’s unwritten review policy. Case 22-CV-277 in U.S. District Court for D.C.  |
| April Goggans |  | DC activist, leader of Black Lives Matter | Sued MPD for records of police surveillance since 2015 she said stemmed from her activism. Represented by Georgetown Law clinic faculty, she eventually got some records but lost court case claiming many errors in police response to her requests. Case No. 2017 CA 7926 B. WAMU story [here](https://wamu.org/story/19/02/11/a-black-lives-matter-protester-is-suing-d-c-police-to-prove-shes-being-surveilled/). She has appealed. |
| Washington Post | OGC board member Chad Bowman was attorney for the Post. BowmanChad@ballardspahr.com  |  | Sued successfully under FOIA to get body worn camera video of Council member Trayon White traffic stop. Case No. 18 CA 5576 B. DC denial was upheld on appeal to the mayor on privacy grounds, but Superior Court judge reversed and held in preliminary decision there was strong public interest. DC settled shortly after, releasing video and paying fees. Post never reported a story on it. Mitch Ryals did [here](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/loose-lips/article/21040882/dc-cant-keep-police-body-camera-footage-of-councilmember-trayon-white-secret-judge-rules). And later made his own FOIA request for the same video. |
| Art Spitzer | artspitzer@gmail.com  | Legal Director, ACLU of DC | Has used FOIA in early stages of exploration in litigation. Getting OSSE on record that they had no instances of injury to preschoolers from dug-involved staff (key fact in successful OAH complaint and hearing challenging random drug testing requirement set by the agency for all preschool staff as part of licensing requirements). Also in stop-and-frisk litigation (using FOIA to get MPD on record they were not collecting data as Council ordered). (Superior Court Case No. 2018 CA 3168 B). |
| ACLU of DC | nmoshiree@acludc.org  | Nassim Moshiree, Policy Director | Uses FOIA for data for policy research. See, for example, 2019 study on MPD arrests by race. Their release [here](https://www.acludc.org/en/racial-disparities-dc-policing-descriptive-evidence-2013-2017); WAMU coverage [here](https://wamu.org/story/19/05/14/aclu-study-finds-d-c-s-black-residents-arrested-at-higher-rate-for-largely-minor-offenses/). |
| ACLU (National) | Anjana Samant |  | DC information obtained by FOIA for [national study](https://www.aclu.org/fact-sheet/family-surveillance-algorithm) of child welfare agencies’ racist and inequitable use of predictive analytics.Anjana Samant, et al. Family Surveillance by Algorithm: The Rapidly Spreading Tools Few Have Heard Of (2021). Cites earlier study Predict-Align-Prevent, Predicting Child Maltreatment Washington, D.C., GitHub, ttps://github.com/PredictAlignPrevent/PredictingChildMaltreatment\_WashingtonDC[https://perma.cc/MH5Y-JB7V]. But adds “However, a recent public records request response suggests no current follow-up. See Letter from Wendy Singleton, FOIA Officer, DC Child & Fam. Servs. Agency, to Todd Feathers, Freelance Journalist, Re: 2021-FOIA-04943 (June 11, 2021), https://www.muckrock.com/foi/washington-48/child-welfare-predictive-analytics-systems-111826/[https://perma.cc/7XWG-QL94] (“Our system does not currently handle anything related to predictive analytics.”) |
| Jonathan Levy | jlevy@legalaiddc.org  | McDowell Appellate Advocacy Project Director, Legal Aid Society of DC | Used FOIA to gather facts to prepare litigation, e.g., getting DC agency reports to USDA on program administration showing delays and federal critical responses, to use in initial complaint in suit against DC for delaying SNAP or Food Stamps eligibility processing, causing extended hunger (Case No. 17-CA-1757, U.S. District Court D.C.) |
| Chris Miller |  | Attorney, DC; former Ward 6 ANC commissioner | Got DC DGS records showing great extent of backlog of unremedied ADA violations for accessibility problems in DC schools. Discussed in Andrew Giambrone City Paper [story in 2016](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/blog/20827194/foia-about-40-percent-of-all-dc-public-schools-have-an-accessibility-issue). |
| Fraternal Order of Police, D.C. chapter (MPD police officers’ union) |  |  | For years a while back, union filed dozens of FOIA requests and litigated denials aggressively seeking MPD data of all kinds to show management issues for use in negotiations. See our blog post on the courts’ view of this history [here](https://www.dcogc.org/content/court-appeals-decides-latest-public-records-case-dc-police-union-and-against-police), on the occasion of another FOP victory after trench warfare. When FOP cases grew and grew (and D.C. lost and lost) our OGC did in-house study of this body of FOIA activity some years ago, to see lessons learned. See, for example, Will Sommer’s City Paper [story in 2013](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/loose-lips/blog/13133907/peace-at-any-cost), of FOP years of FOIA effort to get dirt on MPD funding of Ron Moten’s Peaceoholics program that officers thought was a waste. |
| Kirby Vining  |  | Member of Friends of McMillan Park | Citizens group in Ward 5 wanted emails of Council member McDuffie to see if he had improperly favored developer’s plans for McMillan Reservoir land. FOIA request was denied and that was upheld at Superior Court trial level. Went to Court of Appeals where requestors won and Council gave up the emails. OGC was amicus. Our blogs covered 2015 [argument](https://dcogc.org/blog/d-c-court-of-appeals-warms-to-coalition-arguments-against-novel-speech-and-debate-exemption-for-d-c-council/) and 2016 [victory](https://dcogc.org/blog/d-c-council-to-comply-with-court-of-appeals-decision-overturning-denial-of-citizen-request-for-records-of-mcmillan-reservoir/). |
| Ivy Ken | ivyken@gwu.edu  | Concerned citizen | Frustrated about school food issues, parent tried via FOIA in 2017 to get contract records specifying what food DCPS was ordering and what it cost. Got redacted records and big runaround of claimed exemptions from DCPS, many of which seemed incorrect. Frustrated customer.  |
| Denise Rucker Krepp | @kdrkrepp  | ANC 6B10, Ward 6 commissioner | Originally active using federal FOIA to seek US Attorney prosecution and other crime data in her DC area. (See City Paper [story 2016](https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/blog/13070667/hill-east-commissioner-plans-to-sue-doj-over-denied-crime-data-foia-request).) More recently, active in criticizing handling of sexual assault in military, government, and universities. Using DC FOIA seeking data on agencies’ settlements of sexual assault cases brought against government officials that were quietly put away with money payments. Jeffrey Anderson wrote at length in a [District Dig story](https://districtdig.com/2019/03/20/hollow-promise/) just this March of his own efforts to find what Krepp looked for, via FOIA and other means. Krepp also sought via FOIA unsuccessfully to get MPD body worn camera video of officer treatment of juveniles in street stop in late 2018 on Capitol Hill where she is ANC commissioner. Eventually denied as confidential juvenile incident records. But drew attention early for huge MPD estimate of $5,000 cost of redacting the video if they did release it. Hill Rag [reported](https://hillrag.com/2019/02/02/anc-6b-report-11/). |
| Partnership for Civil Justice | mvh@justiceonline.org, cm@justiceonline.org  | Mara Verheyden-Hilliard and Carl Messineo are the two attorneys.  | Active for decades in representing activists (such as Occupy) including using FOIA aggressively to uncover police treatment of clients. Won FOIA case years ago where court required to release its internal policies, called general orders. Lately, multiple FOIA cases including challenging denial of MPD report naming officers using force in anti-Trump demonstrations at 2016 Inaugural, records of city deal with Trump Hotel, and records of contacts of MPD with Project Veritas (conservative undercover video-takers, whose video of Inauguration protesters showed up in criminal prosecutions).  |
| Open the Government | OGC board members Tom Susman and Kevin Goldberg are on OTG board. | Staffer formerly handling the case has left, Jesse Franzblau. | One DC dive by this national group was request to MPD for plans of DC and federal agencies for handling Trump Inauguration protests. MPD denied, at unwritten and unexplained request of Secret Service, which is not clearly a reason in DC law. But after many months of considering litigation, they did not pursue the case. |
| Paul and Gail Casey | (upstate New York) |  | Parents of a young man killed in DC in 2011 by blows in a street fight. They challenged police and prosecutors (who closed the case calling their son responsible and not charging three at the scene who started it) using FOIA requests for police records and civil litigation against the attackers. Mark Seagraves lengthy 2017 NBC story [here](https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/Couple-Pursues-Justice-for-Sons-Death-in-a-Fight-Outside-a-DC-McDonalds-422136843.html); Post sympathetic editorial calling for more investigation [here](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/an-army-veterans-death-demands-better-answers/2017/08/04/431d8774-76fd-11e7-8839-ec48ec4cae25_story.html?utm_term=.89a700f83b35).  |
| D.C. Prisoners Rights Project |  | Part of Washington Lawyers Committee; assisted by counsel at Covington & Burling | Attempting to get records on women prisoners as part of study to assess their conditions of confinement in DC and federal prisons, the study team got zero cooperation via DC FOIA, they noted in [2016 report](http://www.washlaw.org/pdf/dc_women_in_prison_report.pdf). |

1. **OGC has used the laws**

DC Open Government Coalition has filed Open Meetings Act complaints resulting in findings of agency noncompliance. Examples:

* United Medical Center secret meeting to end key services (blog posts [here](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4913) and [here](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4919))
* Mayor’s Education Cross-Sector Task Force secret meetings (blog posts [here](https://www.dcogc.org/content/transparency-watch-dc-schools-task-force-meet-two-years-develop-ideas-secret) and [here](https://www.dcogc.org/content/dc-transparency-watch-open-government-office-scores-victory-deputy-mayor-gives-plan-two-year))
* State Superintendent Education School Funding Working Group secret meetings (blog post [here](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4656))
* DC Housing Authority secret meetings (blog post [here](https://www.dcogc.org/content/housing-authority-must-stop-secret-board-meetings-new-findings-dc-open-government-office))
* DC Board of Medicine violation of multiple open meetings rules (blog post [here](https://www.dcogc.org/content/dc-board-medicine-keeping-public-dark-unlawful-closed-sessions-says-open-govt-enforcement))

We have filed FOIA requests, administrative appeals and court actions. Also complaints to the Office of Open Government seeking advisory opinions on FOIA policy topics. Examples:

* Lawsuit successfully challenging denial by DC Council of FOIA requests for members’ emails on personal accounts
* *Amicus* brief in case successfully challenging another incorrect Council FOIA denial (Vining case to overturn “speech and debate” exemption claim for members’ emails) (blog posts [here](https://www.dcogc.org/content/council-can%E2%80%99t-claim-foia-speech-or-debate%E2%80%9D-exemption) and [here](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4866))
* Request for records of deputy mayor’s office showing their work with charter schools to keep secret the data resulting from Council-mandated survey of schools’ buildings. Used by City Paper reporter Rachel Cohen in story.
* Complaint successfully challenging unlawful OCTO email search policy (requiring FOIA requester to provide government employees’ email addresses to be searched) (blog post [here](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4900))
* Complaint successfully challenging unlawful MPD requirement that attorneys using FOIA to request records for client provide copy of retainer
* Complaint successfully challenging DC Inspector General’s over-redaction for FOIA release of his office report on former DCPS Chancellor Kaya Henderson misconduct in bending school admissions rules for bigshots’ children seeking special placements (blog post [here](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4906))
1. **Coalition bog posts on uses of DC laws (elaboration on some of the instances above)**

## [D.C. Public Defender Sues for Records from Public Hearing on Officer Misconduct - That MPD Says Are of No Public Interest](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4994)

## [Transparency Watch: Your D.C. Open Records Laws At Work](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4988) (5 examples of use, 4 from DC FOIA discussed above in table – CFSA, Trayon White, Evans, Barras -- and one WMATA PARP)

## [Right to Know in D.C.: Press Wins One, Activist Loses Another, In Two Court Battles Over D.C. Police Records and the Freedom of Information Act](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4986) (Trayon White and Goggans cases)

## [D.C. Transparency Watch: Is MPD Body-Cam Video Redaction Out of Control?](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4969) (using Krepp request for body cam video of juvenile interrogation incident to discuss redaction policy revealed by high price MPD quoted for redaction they ultimately declined to do)

## [D.C. Transparency Watch: Is Councilmember Trayon White’s 2017 Traffic Stop Just His Own Business? The Washington Post Brings FOIA Suit to Find Out](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4968)

## [School Planning in DC Limited by Data Secrecy](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4952) (discussing Rachel Cohen story that used emails OGC got by FOIA and provided to the reporter; included in table above)

## [DC FOIA In Action: Record Requests Proving Useful In Reporting and Civic Action](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4944) (four examples of FOIA use – all in table above: ACLU stop and frisk litigation based on negative evidence from FOIA request for Council-mandated data, Austermuhle on Amazon HQ2 bid, Cohen on charter school contracts to consultants only somewhat available by FOIA, and Legal Aid Food Stamps lawsuit based on FOIA for delay data)

## [FOIA Follies – Questionable D.C. Denials](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4918) (discussing Austermuhle Amazon bid denials, also Ivy Ken food service FOIA; both in table above)

## [D.C. Transparency News - Open Government Laws at Work](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4950) (eleven brief updates, including three based on DC FOIA – more on Austermuhle Amazon HQ2 bid request, Bowser drunken staffer fired, Terrence McCoy in Post on lead paint scandal; all in table above)

## [FOIA Love: Public Records Laws Helping Our Community](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4904) (three items, two in table above: Post story on schools’ covering up suspension reality, and parents investigating son’s death via FOIA)

## [D.C. Council To Comply With Court of Appeals Decision Overturning Denial of Citizen Request for Records of McMillan Reservoir](https://www.dcogc.org/node/4866) (reporting successful litigation in Vining case to overturn unlawful “speech and debate” FOIA exemption claimed by DC Council—victory with help of Coalition amicus brief and also participation in oral argument by board member Bob Becker)

## [D.C. Transparency Watch: Stonewall Faces D.C. Researchers Studying Treatment of D.C. Women Prisoners Here and in Faraway Confinement](https://www.dcogc.org/content/dc-transparency-watch-stonewall-faces-dc-researchers-studying-treatment-dc-women-prisoners) (discussion of DC Prisoners Project bad experience with FOIA part of their study of DC women incarcerated; included in table above)