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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOIA Requester Service Center (FRSC)

FOIA Requester Service Center Vision Statement: *To achieve the highest standards in customer service by providing timely and courteous attention to our customers from our trained, professional staff.*

Mission: *Dedicated and committed to providing premium service to everyone who contacts the FRSC in person, telephonically or electronically.*

Advocacy and Oversight Branch

Advocacy and Oversight Branch Vision Statement: *To achieve the highest standards in fact-finding and analysis to support the qualitative and quantitative standards and mandates within IPS.*

Maintaining a centralized FOIA program for an agency as large, complex and globally situated as the Department is an enormous challenge. However, the centralized nature of the Department's FOIA program provides for better service for requesters. IPS is often referred to as the FOIA office. IPS centralizes the core activities of records management, public access, classification management and review, corporate archives, research, privacy, and special legal functions (including extraordinary document production), as well as the systems that support these core activities.

In 1997, the Office of Information Programs and Services (IPS) created the Advocacy and Oversight Branch (AO) in the Requester Liaison Division (RL) to handle all general FOIA and status inquiries and to manage FOIA requester's expectations and concerns.

- The FRSC is designed to respond to inquiries from our internal and external customers about IPS's services and FOIA and Privacy Act requests; and to focus on customer service, helping all customers in a prompt and courteous manner.
- The FRSC is responsible for handling responses to status inquiries made telephonically, electronically (via email) or by mail from: the general public, the congress, other Federal agencies or within the Department.
- The FRSC maintains the Public and Electronic Reading Rooms that contain a wealth of information about the FOIA, the Department of State's organizations and records systems, and significant document collections released to the public.
- The FRSC serves as the content managers of the FOIA website ensuring that the most accurate and current information is available and accessible.

Executive Orders

In 1993, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12862 "Setting Customer Service Standards", challenging Federal agencies to improve customer service and tasked agencies to survey its customers to identify what kinds of services they really want. In December 2005,

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President Bush signed Executive Order 13392 “Improving Agency Disclosure of Information”. The Order emphasized enhanced FOIA compliance through citizen-centered, results-oriented operations while requiring clear action plans and goals with concrete milestones and timetables, transparent accountability linked directly to responsible agency officials, and senior level commitment to success. Each Federal agency was challenged to improve its program, centered on customer service. IPS has a long history of continuously looking for ways to improve upon its business processes and the technologies that support them in order to provide the highest level of service possible to its many customers around the world. Thus, IPS welcomes the opportunity afforded by E.O. 13392 to share its successes and experiences with all whom are interested.

Open Government Act of 2007

Upon request, the FOIA Requester Service Center will provide an estimated date on which the agency will complete action on the request. Requesters may obtain this estimated date by calling the FRSC at the phone number listed below. Please note that an estimated date of completion might not be immediately available as FRSC representatives will need to review the case file, as appropriate. Please note that this date is merely an estimate and is not intended to be the actual date of completion. The date of estimated completion may change throughout the process depending on various factors.

FOIA REQUESTER SERVICE CENTER'S CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

- All new employees will be introduced to the FRSC's customer service standards as part of their orientation and they will receive customer service training to understand the value of customer service as well as the importance of following the FRSC approved standards.
- All new FRSC employees will receive on-sight customer service training within three days of arrival. The Department's Foreign Service Institute will provide formal training within 60 days.

Process:

- Consistency in policy, procedures and guidelines;
- Frequent communication with our customers, including feedback and follow-up;
- Prompt handling of inquiries and feedback; and
- Continuous assessment of processes, focusing on improving our internal operations to deliver better service.

Quality:

- Timely responses to inquiries pertaining to FOIA or Privacy Act requests;
- Prompt, courteous, unbiased, and professional treatment;
- Accurate and up-to-date guidance; and
- Prompt attention to problems and concerns.

Service:

Telephone/Voicemail

Customers have a right to expect that:

- The FRSC will answer telephone calls Monday – Friday 8:15 – 5:00, except Federal holidays and closures due to early dismissal and emergencies.
- The phone will be answered within three rings during business hours in the order in which they were received.
- When more than three callers are in a holding mode, if available, more analysts will be added to receive calls.
- Each caller will be treated in a courteous and respectful manner.
- Acknowledgements of voicemail messages will be returned no later than the close of the next business day.
- Every caller has the right to speak with the FRSC supervisor if they believe their call is not handled according to our customer service standards.
- When a FRSC supervisor does not resolve professional issues of the Center, the caller has the right to speak with the FOIA Public Liaison Officer to seek resolution.

Written Correspondence (Congressional correspondence, status letters, email, fax inquiries)

Customers have the right to expect that written correspondence is:

- Written in plain language;
- Complete, accurate, and relevant to our customer's needs;
- Timely or an interim communication explaining the delay, if necessary.

In Person

Customers have the right to expect analysts to be:

- Courteous and respectful;
- Informed, accurate, and resourceful; and
- To remain with each visitor to provide on-the-spot assistance.

FOIA Web Site

Customers can expect our FOIA web site:

- To provide access to the current laws, regulations, policies, and orders affecting information sharing and privacy issues;
- To be user-friendly and informative, based on feedback from our customers; and
- To contain materials of historic value and interest to our customers, as well as final opinions made in the adjudication of administrative cases, specific agency policy statements and certain administrative staff manuals.

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You are important to us. Our goal is to know, and exceed your expectations. To help us meet this goal, please communicate your concerns, favorable or not, by calling the FRSC at 202-261-8484.

Thank you.