

Wisconsin Transparency Project: FOX6 News sues Governor Evers to obtain his emails

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Governor refused request for emails in specified date range, demands FOX6 provide search terms

The Wisconsin Transparency Project, on behalf of WITI-FOX6, has filed an open records lawsuit against Governor Tony Evers in Dane County Circuit Court. The suit alleges that the Governor is refusing to provide copies of his emails, unlawfully insisting that FOX6 provide search terms for those emails.

This story began when Amanda St. Hilaire, FOX6 investigative reporter, filed a request seeking all of the governor's and his chief of staff's emails over a four-week period. Journalists often file this kind of "spot check" record request to learn who government officials have been communicating with and what they have been discussing, and rarely encounter any difficulty.

The Governor, however, denied the request, insisting that St. Hilaire provide search terms for her request. His staff attorneys claim that turning over a block of emails is too burdensome, even though searching for specific emails would actually require more work.

St. Hilaire tried again, asking for only a week's emails. That request was denied for the same reason. Finally, she asked for a single day of just the Governor's emails, which was also denied despite the Governor stating publicly that the public should be allowed to see his emails. The Governor eventually relented on that final request, but still claimed he was extending an "exception" to St. Hilaire and that he could deny a similar request in the future.

“Governor Evers’ denial is unlawful,” explained Tom Kamenick, the Transparency Project’s founder and president. “State law requires requesters to provide a limitation on either time frame or subject matter, not both. And even if they do need both, the subject matter of this request was emails to and from two identified people. That’s more than specific enough to satisfy the law.”

For questions or a copy of the complaint, contact Tom Kamenick, President and Founder of the Wisconsin Transparency Project.

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