

SUBMITTED OCTOBER 19, 2026

Public copy: personal contact details omitted.

October 19, 2026

Public Records Custodian
University of North Carolina System Office
223 S. West Street, Suite 1800
Raleigh, NC 27603

Re: Public records request concerning UNC System leadership's knowledge, communications and oversight of UNC-Chapel Hill coronavirus research

Dear Public Records Custodian:

Pursuant to Chapter 132 of the North Carolina General Statutes, I request electronic copies of the records described below, created or received between January 1, 2018, and October 19, 2026, and held by the UNC System Office.

This request concerns the System Office's administrative knowledge, governance, oversight and public communications regarding coronavirus research associated with UNC-Chapel Hill and its domestic and international collaborations. It seeks records showing what System leadership was told, what questions or concerns were raised, and what administrative actions were considered or taken.

It does not seek ordinary pandemic operations records, such as campus reopening plans, testing arrangements or general health guidance, unless they also address the specific research and oversight matters described below.

1. Custodians and offices

Please prioritize responsive records of:

- William L. "Bill" Roper, who became interim UNC System president on January 1, 2019, including records retained in presidential, transition and archived files.
- Peter Hans, who became UNC System president on August 1, 2020, including any responsive System-held records from his earlier service as an adviser to President Margaret Spellings.
- Chris McClure, including records from his service in the Office of the President and as executive vice president and chief of staff under Roper.
- Norma Houston, including records from her service as chief of staff to President Hans through February 2025.
- Andrea Poole, including records from her earlier service as university secretary through March 2019 and her return as chief of staff in 2025.
- Margaret Spellings, including responsive presidential and transition records within the requested period.

Please also search the following offices and their retained records, including those of predecessor officeholders where applicable:

- Legal Affairs, including Thomas Shanahan and Andrew Tripp.
- Communications, including Jane Stancill and predecessor communications leadership.
- Academic Affairs, including Kimberly van Noort and David English.
- Government Relations, including Bart Goodson and predecessor leadership.
- Office of the Secretary, including Meredith McCullen and relevant Board operations staff, including Cindy Jones.

These names identify likely custodians rather than limit the request. Please include responsive records maintained in shared mailboxes, office files and archives, and records held by staff who prepared briefings or communications for these officials.

Communications involving Richard Burr

Please also include responsive records held by the System Office concerning communications or interactions with Richard Burr or his representatives, whether during or after his Senate service, relating to the subjects described below. This requests System-held records, not a search of Burr's own files.

2. Records requested

A. Leadership briefings and awareness

Briefing memoranda, presentations, correspondence, meeting notes and calendar entries concerning UNC-Chapel Hill coronavirus research and questions about its possible relationship to the emergence of SARS-CoV-2, including communications involving Ralph Baric, EcoHealth Alliance, Peter Daszak, the Wuhan Institute of Virology or Richard Burr.

B. Decisions concerning independent examination

Records concerning proposals, requests, recommendations or decisions to commission, authorize, decline, postpone or limit an independent investigation, review or audit of the research, related collaborations, laboratory safety, funding representations or institutional oversight.

C. Administrative discussion of research proposals and funding

Administrative briefings and communications concerning the DEFUSE proposal submitted to DARPA, its rejection, and discussions of subsequent funding applications or awards involving related collaborators or research, including CREID.

This category seeks leadership and oversight communications. It does not request unpublished experimental plans, technical methods or underlying laboratory data.

D. Communications with campus and university leadership

Responsive communications between the System Office and UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC Health, the Board of Trustees, the Board of Governors, Richard Burr or representatives of his office, including communications concerning institutional responsibilities, requests for information, proposed responses and decisions about review or disclosure.

E. Governmental inquiries and requests

Records concerning inquiries, document requests, testimony requests or oversight communications from Congress, federal funding or regulatory agencies, North Carolina elected officials, legislative staff, Richard Burr or his representatives, or the State Auditor relating to these matters.

Please include administrative communications concerning responses, referrals, coordination and preservation of responsive records.

F. Public statements and media communications

Media inquiries, draft and final statements, talking points, correspondence and instructions concerning public responses to questions about UNC-associated coronavirus research, its collaborators, COVID-19 origins, laboratory safety or requests for disclosure and independent examination.

G. Administrative handling of public-records matters

Nonprivileged records concerning the administrative handling of U.S. Right to Know's requests and litigation, including decisions about responsibility, staffing, searches, processing, public explanations and communications with leadership.

This category does not seek confidential legal advice or protected litigation strategy.

H. Board of Governors records

Responsive agendas, minutes, presentations, briefing materials and correspondence prepared for or distributed to Board of Governors members, officers or committees.

Please include any portions of closed-session records that may lawfully be released. I am not requesting disclosure of material properly withheld under applicable law.

I. Outside reviews and expenditures

Nonconfidential contracts, engagement letters, invoices and expenditure records concerning outside consultants, communications services or independent reviewers retained in connection with these matters. Privileged narrative descriptions may be redacted where legally required.

3. Research exemption and other confidentiality provisions

I recognize the Court of Appeals' January 7, 2026 decision in U.S. Right to Know v. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, No. COA25-420, and that the North Carolina Supreme Court subsequently declined discretionary review.

I understand that the decision interprets G.S. 116-43.17 to protect qualifying research data and research records without requiring that they also be proprietary.

Accordingly, this request is directed toward administrative governance, oversight and communications records. I am not asserting that an administrator's possession of a document automatically makes it public, or that every document within the requested categories falls outside the research exemption.

If G.S. 116-43.17 is invoked, please explain how the withheld record or reasonably described category satisfies the statute, including its requirement that the material be produced or collected by or for a state institution of higher learning in the conduct of commercial, scientific or technical research.

Please evaluate administrative cover emails, meeting arrangements and other separable communications independently from any research attachments they accompany.

I do not seek material properly withheld under attorney-client privilege, applicable personnel confidentiality provisions, protections for internal audit workpapers or other applicable law. Please identify the statutory or other legal basis for withholding responsive material.

Under G.S. 132-6(c), please provide reasonably separable nonconfidential portions rather than withhold an entire record solely because it contains confidential material.

If an existing responsive document index, withholding log or similar record is available and subject to disclosure, please provide it. This request does not require creation of a new substantive compilation.

4. Search and production

Responsive records may include emails and attachments, memoranda, presentations, calendar invitations, meeting notes, text messages and other electronic communications concerning public business, including such communications on personal accounts or devices to the extent maintained by or within the custody or control of the System Office.

Potential search terms include Baric, EcoHealth, Daszak, Wuhan Institute of Virology, Richard Burr, Burr, DEFUSE, PREEMPT, CREID, coronavirus research, SARS-CoV-2 origins, laboratory origin, lab leak, U.S. Right to Know and Carolina Flu.

These are suggested search aids, not a request for every record mentioning COVID-19. Please apply them in the context of the categories above.

Please provide electronic records in an existing usable electronic format, preserving available sender, recipient, date and subject information and associated attachments. Identical duplicates

may be removed, but please preserve materially different threads, attachments and annotations.

Rolling production is welcome. Please prioritize records from 2018 through 2021, particularly those of Roper, Hans and their presidential and chief-of-staff offices, followed by records from 2022 through October 19, 2026.

If the scope presents practical difficulties, please contact me to discuss search sequencing or reasonable clarification before treating the request as unmanageable.

5. Fees, acknowledgment and preservation

Please provide a written estimate before incurring any charge, distinguishing reproduction costs from any proposed special-service charge and explaining its basis. Please obtain my written agreement before proceeding with chargeable work. I have not authorized expenditures exceeding \$100.

Please exclude the cost of separating confidential from nonconfidential material, which G.S. 132-6(c) assigns to the public agency.

Please acknowledge receipt, provide a tracking number if available, and offer an estimated production schedule when practicable. I recognize that North Carolina law does not establish a general fixed acknowledgment deadline and requires records to be furnished as promptly as possible.

Please preserve responsive records while this request is pending, consistent with applicable law and retention requirements. If responsive records have been transferred to another office or archive, please identify that location if known. If records are unavailable because they were disposed of, please provide any existing, publicly disclosable retention or disposition records documenting that action.

Thank you for your assistance.

Respectfully,

George A. Howard '89
Co-founder, CarolinaFlu.org
<https://carolinaflu.org>