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## DOJ files request to unseal Epstein grand jury records after uproar over files

The department said the request follows "extensive public interest."

By [Michelle Stoddart](#), [Alexandra Hutzler](#), [Alexander Mallin](#), and [Ivan Pereira](#)

July 18, 2025, 6:48 PM



**DOJ files request to unseal Epstein grand jury records after uproar over files** The Justice Department formally requested Friday the unsealing of grand jury records tied to federal investigations into Jeffrey Epstein, according to a court filing.

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President Donald Trump announced the previous day that he ordered Attorney General Pam Bondi to seek the release of additional Epstein material following pushback from conservatives and others for more transparency in the case.

"At the direction of the Attorney General, the Department of Justice hereby moves the Court to release grand jury transcripts associated with the above-referenced indictment," the motion said.



Donald Trump looks on on the day he signs the HALT Fentanyl Act, in the East Room at the White House in Washington, D.C., July 16, 2025.

Umit Bektas/Reuters

The department said in the filing that the request follows "extensive public interest" generated since DOJ and FBI issued its July 6 memo regarding their decision not to release any further files from federal investigations into Epstein.

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**MORE: Bondi says she'll try to unseal Epstein grand jury records→**

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"While the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation continue to adhere to the conclusions reached in the Memorandum, transparency to the American public is

of the utmost importance to this Administration," the filing stated. "Given the public interest in the investigative work conducted by the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation into Epstein, the Department of Justice moves the Court to unseal the underlying grand jury transcripts in United States v. Epstein, subject to appropriate redactions of victim-related and other personal identifying information."

The filing says DOJ plans to work with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York "to make appropriate redactions of victim-related information and other personal identifying information prior to releasing the transcripts."

"Transparency in this process will not be at the expense of our obligation under the law to protect victims," the filing adds.

The filing requests the court "conclude that the Epstein and [Ghislaine] Maxwell cases qualify as a matter of public interest, release the associated grand jury transcripts, and lift any preexisting protective orders."

The motion is signed only by Attorney General Pam Bondi and Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche — no career prosecutors in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York are on the filing.



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This undated trial evidence image obtained December 8, 2021, from the US District Court for the Southern District of New York shows British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell and US financier Jeffrey Epstein.

US District Court for the Southern District of New York via AFP via Getty Images

The Justice Department's filing comes as Trump has filed a libel lawsuit against the Wall Street Journal, Rupert Murdoch and others over the Thursday report about Trump's alleged birthday message sent to Epstein in 2003. According to the lawsuit, Trump is seeking \$10 billion in damages.

Trump has denied to the Wall Street Journal that he wrote the letter. ABC News has not been able to confirm the existence of the letter.

"I look forward to getting Rupert Murdoch to testify in my lawsuit against him and his 'pile of garbage' newspaper, the WSJ. That will be an interesting experience!!!" the president wrote on his social media platform Friday morning.

Earlier Friday, Trump suggested there is no "smoking gun" in the Epstein files as he seeks to downplay a case that's long animated his MAGA supporters.

"If there was a 'smoking gun' on Epstein, why didn't the Dems, who controlled the 'files' for four years, and had Garland and Comey in charge, use it? BECAUSE THEY HAD NOTHING!!!" Trump wrote on his conservative social media platform.

Trump said he asked Bondi to "produce any and all pertinent Grand Jury testimony, subject to Court approval."



Attorney General Pam Bondi speaks to reporters as President Donald Trump listens, June 27, 2025, in the briefing room of the White House in Washington.

Jacquelyn Martin/AP

**MORE: Trump claims Epstein files are faked, but many documents have been public for years**



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The move from Trump to order the attorney general to seek the release of additional grand jury material comes after a week of intense pressure from his [MAGA supporters to do more](#) on Epstein following a [brief memo](#) from the Justice Department and FBI stating no further disclosure "would be appropriate or warranted."

The memo stated a review from the DOJ and FBI found no evidence that Epstein kept a so-called "client list" of associates or that he blackmailed any prominent individuals, and also confirmed the disgraced financier died by suicide in prison while awaiting trial on sex-trafficking charges.

Bondi days ago had said the "memo speaks for itself."

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**MORE: The times Trump's name appeared in the Epstein files the DOJ has already released**



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Between then and now, Trump has tried to tamp down intrigue into Epstein that's been fueled by right-wing figures for years, including conspiracy theories of a "deep state" protecting the country's elites.

He has called the Epstein files a "Democratic hoax" against him and those Republican supporters who are questioning his administration's handling of them as "stupid" and "foolish."

But his administration has shut down the idea of appointing a special prosecutor in the Epstein case.

"The idea was floated from someone in the media to the president. The president would not recommend a special prosecutor in the Epstein case. That's how he feels," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters at Thursday's briefing.

Sen. Dick Durbin, the top Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, penned three separate letters to Bondi, FBI Director Kash Patel and FBI Deputy Director Dan Bongino to raise questions about discrepancies concerning the Epstein files and about the July 7 memo from the administration concerning Epstein.

Durbin wrote that his office received information that Bondi "pressured the FBI" to enlist 1,000 personnel, along with New York field office personnel, to review approximately 100,000 Epstein related records and to "flag" any records in which Trump was mentioned. He asked Bondi to respond to a number of questions concerning her personal review of the Epstein documents.

*ABC News' Allison Pecorin contributed to this report.*

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Bondi made about the case of convicted sex offender and financier Jeffrey Epstein.

The two-page memo, which by the FBI and the Justice Department published after an “exhaustive review” of materials related to Epstein, concluded that there is no evidence of an “incriminating ‘client list’” or evidence that would lead to additional prosecution of third parties. The memo also concluded that Epstein [died by suicide in his New York City jail cell in 2019](#) and that no evidence was found to suggest he had participated in blackmail.

The findings closely mirror what NBC News and many other outlets have reported and published for years – that while [Epstein sexually abused underage girls](#), he did not keep a secret list of powerful pedophile clients he was blackmailing.

The unsigned memo, which [Axios first reported](#) on Sunday, has enraged many prominent conservatives online who have often been supportive of the Trump administration, leading some to allege that Trump’s Justice Department has taken part in a larger conspiracy to cover up aspects of the Epstein affair, which conspiracy theorists say implicates powerful and famous people, particularly Democrats.

Elon Musk, who has recently feuded with Trump and his administration after he left his post at the White House, led the charge criticizing the Trump administration over the memo, [posting eight times](#) Sunday and Monday and [reposting a post](#) from a user saying: “If the entire government is protecting pedophiles, it has officially become the government against the people.”

In particular, conservatives have expressed anger that Trump and other administration members promised tangible disclosures about Epstein if Trump were elected.

On Monday morning, Musk responded “anytime now” to a video [posted last year](#) showing Trump saying he would have “no problem” looking into an Epstein client list.

Others have zeroed in on statements made by Bondi.

In February, Bondi indicated to Fox News host John Roberts that files related to law enforcement’s investigations into Epstein – information that in reality was already [largely public](#) – included a list of Epstein clients.

“It’s sitting on my desk right now to review,” [Bondi said](#), responding to a question about a potential client list, adding that she had “not yet” seen any bombshells.

In the wake of the memo, conservative critics are pointing to the segment as an indication of a cover-up.

“Sorry but this is unacceptable,” said online activist [Robby Starbuck](#), best known for his successful pressure campaigns targeting major corporations for their diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

“Was she lying then or is she lying now? We deserve answers,” Starbuck posted [alongside the video](#).

During a segment of his YouTube show that lasted over 90 minutes, conservative pundit [Benny Johnson declared](#) that “the federal government [is] officially confirming the cover-up is complete with Jeffrey Epstein.”

Mike Benz, who worked in the State Department in Trump’s first administration, [said on the “Real America’s Voice”](#) talk show that while he trusted the senior Trump officials who released the memo, he nevertheless believed there was a vast “deep state” conspiracy.

“I think you have a global network here that spans the Central Intelligence Agency in the U.S., that spans British intelligence, Israeli intelligence, Saudi intelligence,” he claimed, without evidence.

Conservative commentator Rogan O’Handley, who goes by DC\_Draino online and participated in a Trump administration photo op in February holding binders labeled “The Epstein Files,” on Monday called the memo part of a “shameful chapter” in the country’s history.

“Assuming this leaked Epstein Files memo is true, then we all know this is a shameful cover-up to protect the most heinous elites. We were told multiple times the files would be released, and now it looks like backroom deals have been made to keep them hidden,” he wrote in a post.

On Tuesday, Bondi addressed commentary on the segment during a White House Cabinet meeting, saying she meant the Epstein file was sitting on her desk at the time, not any client list specifically.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt [defended the memo](#) Monday, saying at a news briefing that the Justice Department and FBI had “committed to an exhaustive investigation. That’s what they did, and they provided the results of that.”

Asked for a message for Trump supporters who expected more people to be held accountable for Epstein’s alleged crimes, she said that “this administration wants anyone who has ever

committed a crime to be held accountable.”

One former proponent of the Epstein conspiracy theory who has been silent is Dan Bongino, now the deputy director of the FBI. Before he took that job, Bongino boosted [claims on his podcast](#) that Epstein was a career blackmailer.

In a Jan. 4, 2024, episode, Bongino played a clip of a journalist saying she was “100%” convinced that Epstein was killed “because he made his whole living blackmailing people.”

Bongino told his listeners that he’d heard the same claims from another reporter and that they were “super important.” The FBI declined to comment about Bongino’s former claims.

The memo also acknowledged the challenges in releasing further material because so much of it could be harmful to Epstein’s accusers.

“Epstein harmed over one thousand victims,” the memo said. “Each suffered unique trauma. Sensitive information relating to these victims is intertwined throughout the materials. This includes specific details such as victim names and likenesses, physical descriptions, places of birth, associates, and employment history.”

The FBI and the Justice Department also [released two versions](#) of a nearly 11-hour video of the outside of a prison cell door, purportedly as evidence that no one else was involved when Epstein killed himself.

But that has done little to quell conspiracy claims. In both versions, timestamps on the videos jump from 11:58 p.m. to midnight, which has already inspired posts on X with tens of thousands of views claiming a government conspiracy to hide incriminating video.

In Tuesday's Cabinet meeting, Bondi said the prison Epstein was in used a system that reset every night at around midnight, leaving a minute missing from every day's video. She said the Justice Department was looking to obtain further video to release to illustrate the pattern.



Kevin Collier

Kevin Collier is a reporter covering cybersecurity, privacy and technology policy for NBC News.



Kelly O'Donnell

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LAW

## DOJ says no evidence Jeffrey Epstein had a 'client list' or blackmailed associates

JULY 7, 2025 · 2:28 PM ET



Ryan Lucas



Unidentified people carrying binders bearing the seal of the US Justice Department reading "The Epstein Files: Phase 1" walk out of the West Wing of the White House in February. The Trump administration had promised it would release documents on late tycoon and convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein who was found dead in his prison cell in 2019.

Saul Loeb/AFP via Getty Images

The Justice Department and the FBI have found no evidence that disgraced financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein had a "client list" or that he

blackmailed prominent associates.

The conclusions are included in a two-page memo outlining the "exhaustive review" the department conducted of the Epstein files in its possession. The memo also states that after a "thorough investigation," the FBI found that Epstein died by suicide, which aligns with previous department conclusions.

The findings contradict past statements from Attorney General Pam Bondi about an alleged list of Epstein clients. And it's unclear if the memo will tamp down on the continued public skepticism about Epstein's case, particularly his suicide.

Epstein died at a federal lockup in New York City in August 2019 while awaiting trial on federal sex-trafficking charges. His death has fueled numerous conspiracy theories, particularly on the far right, because of his ties to the wealthy and powerful and the continued speculation surrounding his death.



## POLITICS

### How conspiracy theorists explain Trump officials' pivots on Jeffrey Epstein

Axios was the first to report on the memo.

Bondi has long promised to release documents from the Epstein investigation. She made public a small batch of files in February, and said the move was part of the

administration's "commitment to transparency and lifting the veil on the disgusting actions of Jeffrey Epstein and his co-conspirators."

That same month, she told Fox News in an interview that Epstein's client list was "sitting on my desk right now to review."

More than four months later, the department memo directly contradicts her.

"This systematic review revealed no incriminating 'client list.' There was also no credible evidence found that Epstein blackmailed prominent individuals as part of his actions," the memo says. "We did not uncover evidence that could predicate an investigation against uncharged third parties."

Asked Monday about Bondi's previous remarks, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt tried to play down the discrepancy.

"She was saying the entirety of all the paperwork, all of the paper in relation to Jeffrey Epstein's crimes," Leavitt told reporters. "That's what the attorney general was referring to, and I'll let her speak for that."

Leavitt added that the attorney general and the FBI director pledged, at Trump's direction, to conduct an exhaustive review of the Epstein materials "and that's what they did, and they provided the results of that. That's transparency."

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UNTANGLING DISINFORMATION

**Here's why conspiracy theories about Jeffrey Epstein keep flourishing**

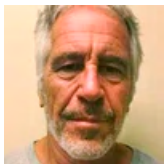


## Suicide in line with prior findings, medical evidence

The unsigned memo says the FBI and the department went through its investigative files related to Epstein—digital searches of databases, hard drives, network drives and physical searches of cabinets, desks and closets—to find any and all relevant materials.

Epstein's died by suicide on Aug. 10, 2019 at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in New York City, according to the memo. It notes that the conclusions is consistent with previous findings, including those of the city's chief medical examiner, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan and the DOJ's inspector general.

It says the conclusion his death was by suicide is also supported by video footage from the common area of the prison unit where Epstein was being held when he died.



LAW

### **Court documents reveal names of powerful men allegedly linked to Jeffrey Epstein**

"Anyone entering or attempting to enter the tier where Epstein's cell was located ... would have been captured by this footage," the memo states. "The FBI's independent review of this footage confirmed that from the time Epstein was locked in his cell at around 10:40 pm on Aug 9, 2019, until around 6:30 am the next morning, nobody entered any of the tiers."

FBI Director Kash Patel and Deputy Director Dan Bongino have previously raised questions about the official account of Epstein and his death. Since taking top jobs at the bureau, though, they have publicly stated that Epstein killed himself.

Both men faced backlash online from conspiracy theorists.

The memo states that there are more than 1,000 victims of Epstein's abuse, and that sensitive information on those individuals is contained in the investigative files. It says that combatting child exploitation and providing justice to victims are

top priorities, and that "perpetuating unfounded theories about Epstein serves neither of those ends."

"To that end, while we have labored to provide the public with maximum information regarding Epstein and ensured examination of any evidence in the government's possession, it is the determination of the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation that no further disclosure would be appropriate or warranted," the memo says.

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# DOJ says no evidence Jeffrey Epstein had a 'client list' or blackmailed associates



By Ryan Lucas (NPR)

July 7, 2025 1:56 p.m.



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Unidentified people carrying binders bearing the seal of the US Justice Department reading "The Epstein Files: Phase 1" walk out of the West Wing of the White House in February. The Trump administration had promised it would release documents on late tycoon and convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein who was found dead in his prison cell in 2019.

Saul Loeb / AFP via Getty Images

The Justice Department and the FBI have found no evidence that disgraced financier and convicted sex offender [Jeffrey Epstein](#) had a “client list” or that he blackmailed prominent associates.

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The conclusions are included in a [two-page memo](#) outlining the “exhaustive review” the department conducted of the Epstein files in its possession. The memo also states that after a “thorough investigation,” the FBI found that Epstein died by suicide, which aligns with previous department conclusions.

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Epstein died at a federal lockup in New York City in August 2019 while awaiting trial on federal sex-trafficking charges. His death has fueled [numerous conspiracy theories](#), particularly on the far right, because of his ties to the wealthy and powerful and the continued speculation surrounding his death.

Axios was the first to report on the memo.

Bondi has long promised to release documents from the Epstein investigation. She made public a small batch of files in February, and said the move was part of the administration’s “commitment to transparency and lifting the veil on the disgusting actions of Jeffrey Epstein and his co-conspirators.”

That same month, she told Fox News in an interview that Epstein’s client list was “sitting on my desk right now to review.”

More than four months later, the department memo directly contradicts her.

“This systematic review revealed no incriminating ‘client list.’ There was also no credible evidence found that Epstein blackmailed prominent individuals as part of his actions,” the memo says. “We did not uncover evidence that could predicate an investigation against uncharged third parties.”

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Leavitt added that the attorney general and the FBI director pledged, at Trump's direction, to conduct an exhaustive review of the Epstein materials "and that's what they did, and they provided the results of that. That's transparency."

## Suicide in line with prior findings, medical evidence

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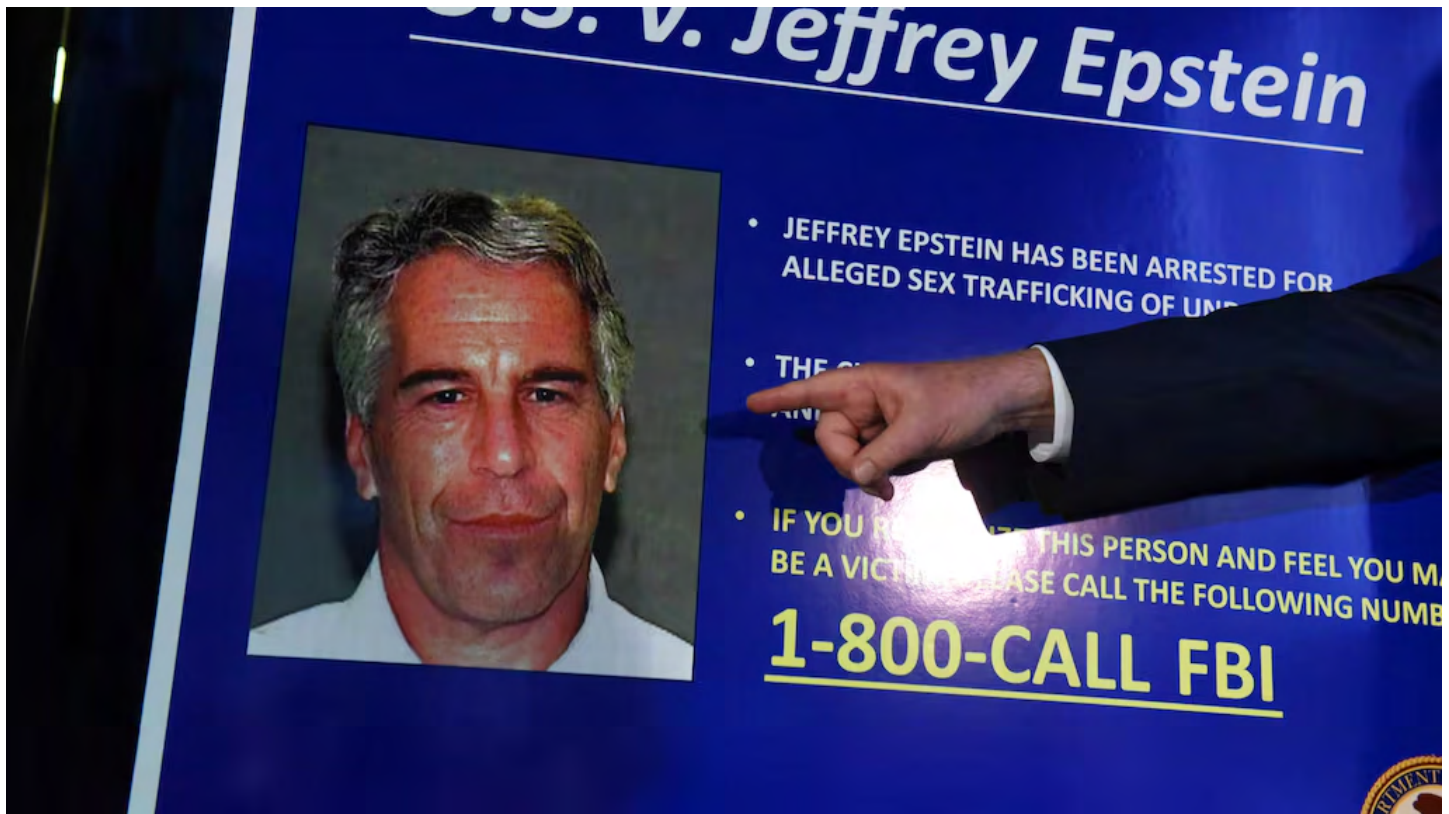
"Anyone entering or attempting to enter the tier where Epstein's cell was located ... would have been captured by this footage," the memo states. "The FBI's independent review of this footage confirmed that from the time Epstein was locked in his cell at around 10:40 pm on Aug 9, 2019, until around 6:30 am the next morning, nobody entered any of the tiers."

FBI Director [Kash Patel](#) and Deputy Director Dan Bongino have previously raised questions about the official account of Epstein and his death. Since taking top jobs at the bureau, though, they have publicly stated that Epstein killed himself.

Both men faced backlash online from conspiracy theorists.

The memo states that there are more than 1,000 victims of Epstein's abuse, and that sensitive information on those individuals is contained in the investigative files. It says that combatting child exploitation and providing justice to victims are top priorities, and that "perpetuating unfounded theories about Epstein serves neither of those ends."

"To that end, while we have labored to provide the public with maximum information regarding Epstein and ensured examination of any evidence in the government's possession, it is the determination of the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau



## The new Jeffrey Epstein files have set off a fresh round of conspiracy theories

Epstein, who died by suicide while awaiting trial on federal sex-trafficking charges, is a favorite of conspiracists because of his ties to the wealthy and powerful and speculation about his death.

Jan. 6, 2024

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## What to know about the Jeffrey Epstein 'John Doe' files that were just unsealed

The documents bring new clarity to a tragic and shocking case that alleged acts of illegal sexual predation within an elite world of power and influence.

Jan. 5, 2024

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**U.S. Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Investigation**

As part of our commitment to transparency, the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have conducted an exhaustive review of investigative holdings relating to Jeffrey Epstein. To ensure that the review was thorough, the FBI conducted digital searches of its databases, hard drives, and network drives as well as physical searches of squad areas, locked cabinets, desks, closets, and other areas where responsive material may have been stored. These searches uncovered a significant amount of material, including more than 300 gigabytes of data and physical evidence.

The files relating to Epstein include a large volume of images of Epstein, images and videos of victims who are either minors or appear to be minors, and over ten thousand downloaded videos and images of illegal child sex abuse material and other pornography. Teams of agents, analysts, attorneys, and privacy and civil liberties experts combed through the digital and documentary evidence with the aim of providing as much information as possible to the public while simultaneously protecting victims. Much of the material is subject to court-ordered sealing. Only a fraction of this material would have been aired publicly had Epstein gone to trial, as the seal served only to protect victims and did not expose any additional third-parties to allegations of illegal wrongdoing. Through this review, we found no basis to revisit the disclosure of those materials and will not permit the release of child pornography.

This systematic review revealed no incriminating “client list.” There was also no credible evidence found that Epstein blackmailed prominent individuals as part of his actions. We did not uncover evidence that could predicate an investigation against uncharged third parties.

Consistent with prior disclosures, this review confirmed that Epstein harmed over one thousand victims. Each suffered unique trauma. Sensitive information relating to these victims is intertwined throughout the materials. This includes specific details such as victim names and likenesses, physical descriptions, places of birth, associates, and employment history.

One of our highest priorities is combatting child exploitation and bringing justice to victims. Perpetuating unfounded theories about Epstein serves neither of those ends.

To that end, while we have labored to provide the public with maximum information regarding Epstein and ensured examination of any evidence in the government’s possession, it is the determination of the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation that no further disclosure would be appropriate or warranted.

After a thorough investigation, FBI investigators concluded that Jeffrey Epstein committed suicide in his cell at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in New York City on August 10, 2019. This conclusion is consistent with previous findings, including the August 19, 2019 autopsy findings of the New York City Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, the November 2019 position of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York in connection with the investigation of federal correctional officers responsible for guarding Epstein, and the June 2023 conclusions of DOJ's Office of the Inspector General.

The conclusion that Epstein died by suicide is further supported by video footage from the common area of the Special Housing Unit (SHU) where Epstein was housed at the time of his death. As DOJ's Inspector General explained in 2023, anyone entering or attempting to enter the tier where Epstein's cell was located from the SHU common area would have been captured by this footage. The FBI's independent review of this footage confirmed that from the time Epstein was locked in his cell at around 10:40 pm on August 9, 2019, until around 6:30 am the next morning, nobody entered any of the tiers in the SHU.

During this review, the FBI enhanced the relevant footage by increasing its contrast, balancing the color, and improving its sharpness for greater clarity and viewability. The full raw and enhanced videos are available at the following links: <https://www.justice.gov/video-file1>; <https://www.justice.gov/video-file2>.

**Notorious sex criminal Ghislaine Maxwell** answered questions from Justice Department officials about “100 different people” linked to late pedophile Jeffrey Epstein, an attorney for the disgraced socialite claimed Friday following two days of interrogation led by Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche during which she was reportedly granted limited immunity.

David Oscar Markus told reporters that his client, currently serving a 20-year sentence after being convicted in Manhattan of federal sex trafficking and conspiracy charges in December 2021, was “asked about every possible thing you could imagine – everything.”

“This was the first opportunity she’s ever been given to answer questions about what happened,” Markus added. “The truth will come out about what happened with Mr. Epstein and she’s the person who’s answering those questions.”



Ghislaine Maxwell was interviewed by DOJ officials on Friday, and gave information on about ‘100 different people’ who were linked to Jeffrey Epstein.

Blanche had “every single question” answered during the sitdown, Maxwell’s attorney also said, with the British-born convict declining to plead the Fifth Amendment.

“If she lies they could charge her with lying,” Markus noted.

## EXPLORE MORE



**Ghislaine Maxwell still mulling whether to testify before Oversight Committee, her attorney says**



**Inside Jeffrey Epstein’s cozy relationship with Steve Bannon — and what’s really on his 15 hours of interview tapes**



**Trump says ‘I’ll give you a list’ of Jeffrey Epstein associates amid furor — ‘haven’t thought about’ Ghislaine Maxwell pardon**

“They did charge her with lying,” a reporter challenged him, referring to two perjury counts that Markus noted were dropped by the feds after her conviction.

“No one is above the law — and no lead is off-limits,” Blanche **posted on X** Tuesday in announcing he would speak with Maxwell.



Ghislaine Maxwell was sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2022.

ZUMA24.com

Maxwell, 63, is appealing her conviction and sentencing, and legal observers have speculated her willingness to answer questions is tied to a potential clemency grant by President Trump.

Her attorney described the commander in chief Friday as “the ultimate dealmaker” and claimed his client had “been treated unfairly for the past five years” and “didn’t get a fair trial.”

“We hope he exercises that power in a right and just way,” Markus added.

Trump, 79, told reporters after landing in Glasgow, Scotland that “I don’t know anything about the conversation” between Blanche and Maxwell because “I haven’t really been following it.”

## SEE ALSO



**Trump stuns reporters on Epstein: ‘I’ll give you a**

“This is no time to be talking about pardons,” the president added after saying hours earlier while leaving the White House that “I haven’t thought” about the idea.

list’

Maxwell reportedly initiated the sitdowns with the DOJ and answered questions for roughly nine hours, according to **ABC News**.



David Oscar Markus, an attorney for Ghislaine Maxwell, talks with the media outside the federal courthouse, Friday, July 25, 2025, in Tallahassee, Fla.

AP

The proffer immunity granted to Maxwell allowed her to answer questions without her responses later being used against her in a criminal case, sources told the outlet.

Proffer immunity is typically granted to individuals prosecutors want cooperation from in a criminal case.

In 2022, the Department of Justice expressed doubts that Maxwell could be truthful, writing in court filings that she displayed a “significant pattern of dishonest conduct” and failed to take responsibility for her heinous crimes.

Court papers the prior year revealed that prosecutors never seriously entertained the prospect of offering the women dubbed “Epstein’s madam” a plea agreement after the financier was found dead in his Manhattan jail cell while awaiting his own federal trial on Aug. 10, 2019.



Donald Trump, Melania Trump, Jeffrey Epstein, and Ghislaine Maxwell pose together at the Mar-a-Lago club, Palm Beach, Florida, February 12, 2000.

Getty Images

According to Markus, Epstein’s attorneys had been informed that “no potential co-conspirators would be prosecuted” as part of his talks with government lawyers following his July 2019 arrest on sex trafficking charges.

“I don’t think President Trump knows that the Justice Department took the position that that promise should not be upheld,” he claimed.

In February, Attorney General Pam Bondi teased a full disclosure of federal investigatory files on Epstein during a Fox News interview — including a purported “client list” of high-powered associates — but no such reveal came.



David Oscar Markus, an attorney for Ghislaine Maxwell, talks with the media outside the federal courthouse, Friday, July 25, 2025.

AP

On July 6, the DOJ and FBI put out a two-page memo disclosing that there was “no credible evidence” that 66-year-old had a “client list” or “blackmailed prominent individuals” in his sickening sexual exploitation of girls — some as young as 14 years old.

“We did not uncover evidence that could predicate an investigation against uncharged third parties,” the memo also stated.

Epstein counted influential politicians and businessmen as his associates — including former President Bill Clinton, Microsoft founder Bill Gates and Trump.

The 47th president had a falling out with Epstein in 2004 — and reportedly later banned him from Mar-a-Lago for acting inappropriately with a club member’s daughter.

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4.4K What do you think? [Post a comment.](#)

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## PRESS RELEASE

# Attorney General Pamela Bondi Releases First Phase of Declassified Epstein Files

Thursday, February 27, 2025

**For Immediate Release**

Office of Public Affairs

Today, Attorney General Pamela Bondi, in conjunction with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), declassified and publicly released files related to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and his sexual exploitation of over 250 underage girls at his homes in New York and Florida, among other locations. The first phase of declassified files largely contains documents that have been previously leaked but never released in a formal capacity by the U.S. Government.

**“This Department of Justice is following through on President Trump’s commitment to transparency and lifting the veil on the disgusting actions of Jeffrey Epstein and his co-conspirators,”** said Attorney General Pamela Bondi. **“The first phase of files released today sheds light on Epstein’s extensive network and begins to provide the public with long overdue accountability.”**

**“The FBI is entering a new era — one that will be defined by integrity, accountability, and the unwavering pursuit of justice,”** said FBI Director Kash Patel. **“There will be no cover-ups, no missing documents, and no stone left unturned — and anyone from the prior or current Bureau who undermines this will be swiftly pursued. If there are gaps, we will find them. If records have been hidden, we will uncover them. And we will bring everything we find to the DOJ to be fully assessed and transparently disseminated to the American people as it should be. The**

**oath we take is to the Constitution, and under my leadership, that promise will be upheld without compromise.”**

Attorney General Bondi requested the full and complete files related to Jeffrey Epstein. In response, the Department received approximately 200 pages of documents, however, the Attorney General was later informed of thousands of pages of documents related to the investigation and indictment of Epstein that were not previously disclosed. The Attorney General has requested the FBI deliver the remaining documents to the Department by 8:00 AM on February 28 and has tasked FBI Director Kash Patel with investigating why the request for all documents was not followed.

The Department remains committed to transparency and intends to release the remaining documents upon review and redaction to protect the identities of Epstein’s victims.

A copy of Attorney General Bondi’s letter can be downloaded [here](#).

*Links to released documents below:*

- [A. Evidence List](#)
- [B. Flight Log Released in U.S. v. Maxwell](#)
- [B. Flight Log Released in U.S. v. Maxwell Part1](#)
- [B. Flight Log Released in U.S. v. Maxwell Part2](#)
- [B. Flight Log Released in U.S. v. Maxwell Part3](#)
- [B. Flight Log Released in U.S. v. Maxwell Part4](#)
- [B. Flight Log Released in U.S. v. Maxwell Part5](#)
- [B. Flight Log Released in U.S. v. Maxwell Part6](#)
- [C. Contact Book Redacted](#)
- [D. Masseur List Redacted](#)

*Updated February 27, 2025*

## Topic

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

## Components

## LAW FARE

Executive Branch

## Trump Fired 17 Inspectors General—Was It Legal?

Jack Goldsmith

Monday, January 27, 2025, 9:25 AM

*Probably so, but Congress has lawfully constrained the president's authority to replace the fired IGs.*

On Friday night, President Trump removed at least 17 inspectors general, the executive branch watchdogs who conduct audits and investigations of executive branch actions. The removals are probably lawful even though Trump defied a 2022 law that required congressional notice of the terminations, which Trump did not give. Trump probably acted lawfully, I think, because the notice requirement is probably unconstitutional.

The real bite in the 2022 law, however, comes in the limitations it places on Trump's power *to replace* the terminated IGs—limitations that I believe are constitutional. This aspect of the law will make it hard, but not impossible, for Trump to put loyalists atop the dozens of vacant IG offices around the executive branch. The ultimate fate of IG independence during Trump 2.0, however, depends less on legal protections than on whether Congress, which traditionally protects IGs, stands up for them now. Don't hold your breath.

### Background

The Inspector General Act of 1978 states that “[a]n Inspector General may be removed from office by the President.” For a long time the Act had also required the president to communicate to Congress the “reasons” for the removal within 30 days before removal. A recent amendment to the Inspector General Act, the Securing Inspector General Independence Act of 2022 (Title LII, Subtitle A), changed the notice provision to require a “substantive rationale, including detailed and case-specific reasons” for the removal. It also narrowed the president's options under the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998 (FVRA), for replacing a terminated IG. The 2022 law was mainly a response to Trump's first-term IG firings and manipulations of the IG system. It was one of very few executive branch reforms during the Biden administration.

The Friday IG terminations were announced in emails from Sergio Gor, the White House Director of Presidential Personnel. Gor said the removals were immediate and reflected “changing priorities.” Hannibal Ware, the IG of the Small Business Administration, was one of the fired IGs. In his capacity as the chairperson of the IG oversight and coordination body, he wrote Gor to claim that the firings are not “legally sufficient to dismiss” presidentially appointed and Senate confirmed IGs.

On Saturday night, Trump defended the terminations on the ground that “it’s a very common thing to do.” (Ronald Reagan fired “15 confirmed and acting IGs then working across the executive branch” soon after his 1981 inauguration, though the IG statute at the time authorized him to do so without constraint; and Presidents Obama and Biden fired at least one IG, but they complied with different versions of the notice requirement, as did Trump in his first term.)

“I don’t know [the fired IGs],” Trump added, “but some people thought that some were unfair or were not doing the job.” According to the Washington Post, “Trump said he intended to install new people in the roles but said they would have some independence.”

### **The Notice Standard May Not be Constitutional**

The congressional notice requirement does not specify the grounds on which the president can remove an IG. Rather, it requires the president to provide Congress, with thirty days notice, a “substantive rationale, including detailed and case-specific reasons” for the removal. This is plausibly seen as a very weak for-cause requirement—the president must provide some cause (a “substantive” rationale) in advance of the firing, with details.

One could argue that “changing priorities” is a substantive rationale for the firings. Gor apparently did not provide detailed and case-specific reasons for each firing, but there might have been no reasons to give beyond the “changing priorities” rationale. Yet Trump clearly did not give any notice to Congress. So the administration did not comply with the notice provision.

The Trump administration has a pretty strong argument that the notice provision is unconstitutional. The Court has recognized the president’s “unrestricted removal power” over executive branch officials, subject to only “two exceptions.” The potentially relevant exception here comes from the shriveled and maybe-dead precedent of *Morrison v. Olson* (1988). There the Court ruled that the removal protections on the old independent counsel didn’t unduly interfere with the functioning of the Executive Branch because “the independent counsel [was] an inferior officer under the Appointments Clause, with limited jurisdiction and tenure and lacking policymaking or significant administrative authority.”

For reasons explained in this paper by Ari Spitzer, an inspector general is probably an inferior officer under the Court's appointments clause cases. The main reason is that the IG must "report to and be under the general supervision of the head of the establishment involved."

The president can remove an inferior officer, under *Seila Law*'s interpretation of *Morrison*, unless the officer has "*limited* duties and *no* policymaking or administrative authority." I agree with Spitzer that an IG probably exceeds this standard. IGs in some respects have narrower powers than the independent counsel that was deemed constitutional. They cannot prosecute, for example. But in other dimensions— indefinite tenure and expansive jurisdiction and freedom to initiate an audit or investigation—their powers can be seen as broader than the independent counsel's.

Moreover, IG duties cannot plausibly be described as "limited." And the IG has at least some policymaking authority. It has a duty "to provide policy direction for . . . audits and investigations" even though it does not "determine[]" policies to be pursued by the United States in the nationwide administration of Federal laws." On top of these points, *Seila Law* and more recent decisions have jettisoned other elements of *Morrison*, including its anti-formalist methodology, in the direction of an expanded presidential removal power.

For these reasons, it is a good bet that the Supreme Court will not look kindly on Congress's requirement of a "substantive rationale" and notice for firing IGs. One could see this combination as less onerous than a traditional for-cause restriction of "inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office," though the traditional restriction typically does not have a thirty-day delay. But I don't think these differences matter. The Court has been highly formalistic in its recent removal decisions (including in its removal discussion in *Trump v. United States*). If the Court determines, as I think it will, that the president's exclusive removal power controls the issue, *any* type of congressional constraint must give way.

(There is another tricky issue with the IG removals that I will flag here but lack space to analyze. At least a few of the terminated IGs were career Senior Executive Service (SES) officials with independent statutory job protections. This raises the question whether the president can discharge them from government service (as the removed political IGs clearly are), or whether they must remain in the government in some other SES role. This question intersects with the Trump administration's schedule F gambit and the proper interpretation of the president's power to "remove[]" an IG under the IG statute, and tees up harder Article II questions than I have addressed here. More on this in due course.)

### Constitutionally Valid Limitations on Acting IGs

The IG removal issue is not the biggest of deals, since President Trump had clear statutory authority to remove the IGs if he had provided the easy-to-satisfy substantive rationale and thirty days notice. The much more important issue concerns who replaces the removed IGs. On this issue the 2022 IG law has more bite. The law narrows the definition of the “first assistant” who, under the FVRA, presumptively takes over for the removed IG. It also authorizes the president to replace the first assistant only with another Senate-confirmed IG or a GS-15 or higher employee who was in office for more than 90 days during the year prior to the vacancy.

The practical bottom line is that a career official high up in the office of each IG will by law become the acting IG, and Trump can replace that person only with someone already in the IG cadre.

We do not yet know how Trump plans to replace the fired IGs within these constraints. He might nominate new IGs, but they must be confirmed by the Senate, and that likely will not happen this year. The important question is thus whether Trump can find a lawful and congenial replacement for the first assistant under the 2022 law.

One possibility is an already-confirmed IG such as Joseph Cuffari, the embattled Department of Homeland Security IG who was appointed in Trump 1.0 and whom Trump did not fire on Friday. Or Trump can try to find a congenial IG among the non-political employees who were in place during the Biden administration, which might be hard.

The point I want to make for now is that Congress’s narrowing of the president’s options for acting IGs is much more likely to stick in court because Congress has greater authority over acting replacements for a fired IG than it does over the president’s authority to fire an IG in the first place. The reason, in a nutshell, is that “the power to remove attends the power to appoint,” and the Appointments Clause is not the source of authority for the president to appoint acting officials. The president’s constitutional removal power is thus likely not in play with respect to congressional regulation of actings.

I explained this point five years ago:

The Justice Department has long made clear that the Take Care Clause, not the Appointments Clause, gives the president authority to appoint acting officials. It has also made clear that the president’s power to make temporary appointments is defeasible by Congress. As OLC explained in 1994:

The President’s take care authority to make temporary appointments rests in the twilight area where the President may act so long as Congress is silent, but may not act in the face of congressional prohibition. See *Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. v. Sawyer*, 343 U.S. 579,

637 (1952) (Jackson, J., concurring). Thus, the Vacancies Act, 5 U.S.C.

§§3345-3348, constitutes a restriction on the President's authority, as opposed to a source of power. If it applies to a given position, the Vacancies Act constitutes the sole means by which a temporary appointment to that position may be made.

This quotation is from an unpublished OLC opinion, "Memorandum for Neil Eggleston, Associate Counsel to the President, from Walter Dellinger, Assistant Attorney General, Office of Legal Counsel, Re: Appointment of an Acting Staff Director of the United States Commission on Civil Rights at 3 (Jan. 13, 1994)," and is quoted and explained on page 164 of this 1996 OLC opinion on "The Constitutional Separation of Powers Between the President and Congress." The George W. Bush administration's OLC relied on the 1994 opinion in 2001 when it reiterated that the president "*may not act in the face of congressional prohibition*" to fill a temporary vacancy (emphasis added).

Some 19th century Justice Department opinions had concluded that Congress could not restrict the president's power to make temporary appointments. The 1996 OLC opinion describes these earlier opinions on pages 162-63 before it rejects their analysis. It further explains that the Justice Department had rejected this earlier view beginning with the enactment of the Vacancies Act of 1868, which "Attorneys General treated . . . as providing the exclusive means of making temporary appointments to those offices covered by the statute."

Congress has a long history of providing specific and narrow criteria that presidents must follow in filling vacancies. For some vacancies, Congress directs the person who shall operate as acting when there is a vacancy and leaves the president no discretion. . . .

Moreover, OLC has made clear—on page 3 of the "Memorandum for Neil Eggleston"—that statutes such as the Federal Vacancies Reform Act that purport to authorize presidents to fill vacancies actually operate as "a restriction on the President's authority, as opposed to a source of power." OLC explained: "If it applies to a given position, the Vacancies Act constitutes the sole means by which a temporary appointment to that position may be made."

Broad congressional control of vacancies makes constitutional sense. If the president had exclusive constitutional power to appoint acting officials, then the Recess Appointments power, with its specific limitations, would be practically irrelevant, since a president [could] appoint nonpermanent officials through a different route with no limitations. That cannot be right.

Moreover, OLC has justified the president's defeasible power to make temporary appointments as an exercise of the Take Care Clause in order to "keep the government running." The idea seems to be that in the absence of guidance from Congress, the president's duty to enforce the laws entails a residual power to fill vacancies temporarily in the absence of congressional guidance. But this rationale for executive power gives way when Congress provides a rule. The only judicial decision I have found that addresses this issue, Williams v. Phillips, is consistent with this conclusion. In *Williams*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit suggested (but did not hold) that any inherent presidential power to appoint an acting officer persisted only "in the absence of limiting legislation."

I think this analysis remains sound and will prevail in court. But *Trump v. United States* could impact it. There the Court appeared to hold that the Take Care Clause has an exclusive element that supports the president's authority "to discuss potential investigations and prosecutions with his Attorney General and other Justice Department officials" free from congressional regulation, even when the investigation is an allegedly fraudulent attempt to obstruct a federal proceeding.

The Court did not explain how it squared this ruling with prior decisions, like *Youngstown Steel* and *Kendall v. United States*, which denied that the Take Care Clause could be a basis to disregard law. As *Kendall* said, "[t]o contend that the obligation imposed on the President to see the laws faithfully executed, implies a power to forbid their execution, is a novel construction of the constitution, and entirely inadmissible." I do not believe that the Court in *Trump v. United States sub silentio* altered this foundational principle of law compliance beyond the novel and unusual issues presented in that case. I thus doubt that *Trump v. United States* impacts the longstanding understanding between the branches that congressional constraints on actings are binding on the president.

### Conclusion

Congress's new constraints on the president's ability to replace fired IGs has an excellent chance of surviving unitary executive scrutiny. These are some of the reasons why I supported IG reform for vacancies even as I believed that IG reform on removal was hopeless.

By themselves, however, legal devices like limitations on who can be acting IG cannot save IG independence from an aggressively threatening president and Department head. Only Congress, by pushing back on the administration through politics, can do that.

Whether the Republican-controlled Congress will push back in a meaningful way seems doubtful, especially in light of the tepid reaction to the firings by traditional IG defenders in Congress.

“There may be good reason the IGs were fired,” said longtime IG protector, Senator Chuck Grassley, on Saturday. “We need to know that if so. I’d like further explanation from President Trump. Regardless, the 30 day detailed notice of removal that the law demands was not provided to Congress.” Senator Rand Paul is another staunch IG advocate, and he chairs the [Senate Committee](#) with jurisdiction over the operation of IGs across the government. According to [ABC news](#), Paul “said he believes many of the inspectors general do need to be replaced and that Trump ultimately has the power to do so. But he noted there may be a process that needs to be followed.”

Weak stuff from congressional IG champions following Trump’s Friday night purge.



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publicized executive actions taking aim at immigrants, LGBTQ+ Americans, and federal workers, 17 federal inspectors general were summarily fired without explanation or proper notice to Congress.

Inspectors general — nonpartisan officials charged with rooting out waste, fraud, and abuses of office at their respective agencies — are crucial components of proper government oversight and a healthy democracy. By design, they are independent watchdogs that protect taxpayer money from being spent corruptly or inefficiently, without regard or loyalty to any presidential administration's political whims.

But these watchdogs have long been a target of a president openly disdainful of oversight. In April 2020, at the height of the Covid pandemic and in another late-Friday firing, Trump ousted the intelligence community inspector general who had shared with Congress the whistleblower complaint about Trump's corrupt dealings with Ukraine. He followed that action with a series of other Friday night firings, including of Christi Grimm of the Department of Health and Human Services, who had issued a report about pandemic supply and testing shortages, and of Steve Linick, who was investigating alleged misconduct by then-Secretary Mike Pompeo. He had also removed the inspector general overseeing \$2 trillion in pandemic aid.

Trump's 2025 purge of more than a dozen inspectors general — along with more firings in the weeks after — continued that trend. Certain fired inspectors general had previously looked into or were actively investigating matters that could affect the business interests of billionaire Trump ally Elon Musk, whom Trump chose to oversee the so-called Department of Government Efficiency. This included Defense Department Inspector General Robert Storch, whose office had in late 2024 opened a review of SpaceX's compliance with federal reporting protocols intended to protect state secrets. The office of Phyllis Fong, the inspector general of the Department of Agriculture, who was also fired, had in 2022 launched an investigation of Musk's Neuralink startup. Also among those fired were the Labor Department's Larry Turner and the Transportation Department's Eric Soskin, both from agencies that had previously investigated or had fined Musk companies.

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