May 20, 2009

Kaletus L. McCain
Office of the Solicitor General
Department of Justice
Room 6640, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Ms. McCain:

This is a request under the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552. I am trying to determine how much money the Office of the Solicitor General is spending on access to federal court documents and other primary legal materials. Specifically, I am requesting copies of:

- Any memoranda or budgetary documents that detail the total amount actually spent or the amount budgeted to be spent by the Office of the Solicitor General to access the PACER system run by the Administrative Office of the Courts. I am interested in how much was spent or was budgeted to be spent in the period from 2000 to the present, as well as budget items for future fiscal periods.

- Any agreements, contracts, or memoranda of understanding between the Office of the Solicitor General and the Administrative Office of the Courts governing access to the PACER system by Office of the Solicitor General staff.

- Any memoranda or other documents from Office of the Solicitor General management to Office of the Solicitor General staff asking them to curtail, limit, or otherwise ration their use of the PACER system due to cost considerations.

- Any contracts, memoranda, or budgetary materials detailing the specific agreements and amount of money spent by the Office of the Solicitor General with commercial legal information providers such as Thomson WestLaw or the ReedElsevier LexisNexis service. While I understand such commercial legal information providers have more than just federal data, documents pertaining to the amount spent or budgeted, contracts, and memoranda relating to curtailing use because of cost are all relevant to this inquiry.

Request for News Media Fee Status

Public.Resource.Org asks that we not be charged search or review fees for this request because we qualify as a "representative of the news media" pursuant to the FOIA and 28 C.F.R. § 16.11(b)(6).

Public.Resource.Org, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) public charity chartered to create public works projects on the Internet with a particular focus on making government information
more broadly available without fee to any and all users. Public.Resource.Org has been
certified as a “news media” requester for the purposes of obtaining and publishing
high-resolution video from the United States Congress Recording Studio and we are
engaged in a Joint Venture with the National Technical Information Service (“NTIS”)
under Agreement No. NTIS–1832 to assist in more broadly disseminating materials
from NTIS onto the Internet. Documents from this current FOIA request will be
promptly published, joining over 32.4 million pages of U.S. government documents we
have made available on the Internet.

Due to our extensive publication activities, Public.Resource.Org is a “representative of
the news media” under the FOIA and agency regulations. As such, this request is
subject only to duplication fees after the Office of the Solicitor General 100 pages.
However, all duplication fees should be waived, as discussed below, because disclosure
of the information requested above is in the public interest.

Request for a Public Interest Fee Waiver

Public.Resource.Org is entitled to a waiver of duplication fees because disclosure of the
requested information is in the public interest within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)
(4)(a)(iii) and 28 C.F.R. § 16.11(k). To determine whether a request meets this
standard, agencies determine whether “[d]isclosure of the requested information is
likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities
of the government,” and whether such disclosure “is not primarily in the commercial
interest of the requester.” 28 C.F.R. §§ 16.11(k)(i), (ii). This request clearly satisfies
these criteria.

Office of the Solicitor General, this request concerns “the operations or activities of
the government.” 28 C.F.R. § 16.11(k)(2)(i). The agency’s access to legal research
materials produced by the government constitutes government operations or activities.

Second, disclosure of the requested information will “contribute to an understanding of
government operations or activities.” 28 C.F.R. § 16.11(k)(2)(ii) (internal quotation
marks omitted). Public.Resource.Org has requested information that will publicly reveal
the nature and contents of the access to primary legal materials.

Third, the requested material will “contribute to public understanding” of limitations of
access to legal materials. 28 C.F.R. § 16.11(k)(2)(iii) (internal quotation marks
omitted). This information will contribute not only to Public.Resource.Org’s
understanding of access to primary legal materials by government lawyers, but to he
understanding of a broad audience of persons interested in the subject, since
Public.Resource.Org will make the records available to the public at no cost.

Fourth, the disclosure will “contribute significantly” to the public’s knowledge and
understanding of how much government spends to access public domain materials. 28
C.F.R. § 16.11(k)(2)(iv) (internal quotation marks omitted). Disclosure of the requested
information will permit the public to access the requested records for free.

Furthermore, a fee waiver is appropriate here because Public.Resource.Org has no
commercial interest in the disclosure of the requested records. 28 C.F.R. § 16.11(k)(3).
Public.Resource.Org is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations and will derive no
commercial benefit from the information at issue here.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions or
concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (707) 827–7290. As the FOIA
provides, I will anticipate a determination on this request from your office within 20 working days.

Respectfully yours,

Carl Malamud
President & CEO
Public.Resource.Org