FOIA 'Vexatious Requester' – Press Pack

Open Letter to Judicial Watch

To: Tom Fitton, President, Judicial Watch
From: Alan M. Dransfield, UK Freedom of Information Campaigner
Subject: Importation of UK “Vexatious Requester” Doctrine into U.S. FOIA Law

Dear Mr. Fitton,

I am writing to alert Judicial Watch to a troubling development that should concern all who value open government.

In 2018, the State of Connecticut enacted CGS § 1-206(b), authorizing agencies to petition for relief from so-called “vexatious requesters.” This statute allows government offices to blacklist citizens from making Freedom of Information Act requests for up to one year.

This marks a radical departure from the original intent of FOIA — where the law regulates the request rather than the requester.

The Connecticut law closely mirrors a controversial UK precedent known as the “Dransfield ruling” (2012–2015), which was weaponized by the UK Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) under Commissioner Elizabeth Denham. Courts in London imported the unrelated doctrine of “vexatious litigants” into FOIA law, blurring the lines between legitimate persistence and abuse. Since then, hundreds of FOI requests in Britain have been unlawfully shut down — not because the questions lacked merit, but because the requester was branded vexatious.

The danger is clear:
- This doctrine transforms FOIA from a right of access into a privilege subject to personal profiling.
- It enables governments to silence watchdogs, journalists, and whistleblowers under the guise of “administrative burden.”
- It undermines First Amendment values by criminalizing persistence and public interest inquiry.

Now is a critical moment. On September 11, 2025, the U.S. FOIA Advisory Committee is due to meet in Washington, D.C., where scholars will discuss “vexatious requests” and potential policy reforms.

As a campaigner who has lived through this abuse in the UK, I urge Judicial Watch to:
1. Investigate Connecticut’s law and the legislative history behind it.
2. Publicly warn other states not to replicate this UK-imported censorship model.
3. Reaffirm the principle that FOIA exemptions must apply to requests, not requesters.
4. Engage with the FOIA Advisory Committee process.

Respectfully,
Alan M. Dransfield
Freedom of Information Campaigner (UK)

Media Release

UK “Vexatious Requester” Doctrine Creeps into U.S. FOIA Law

Alan M. Dransfield, a UK Freedom of Information campaigner, has warned Judicial Watch that Connecticut’s 2018 “vexatious requester” law (CGS § 1-206(b)) mirrors the discredited UK Dransfield precedent, which has been weaponized to blacklist citizens from making FOI requests.

“FOIA was meant to judge the request, not the requester. Once governments start banning people, transparency collapses,” said Dransfield.

On September 11, 2025, the U.S. FOIA Advisory Committee will debate “vexatious requests.” Dransfield urges American watchdogs to resist this imported censorship model before it spreads to other states.

Contact:
Alan M. Dransfield
Freedom of Information Campaigner (UK)

Social Media Version

■■ ALERT: UK-style “vexatious requester” bans are creeping into U.S. FOIA.

In 2018, Connecticut passed a law letting agencies blacklist citizens from making FOI requests. This mirrors the UK Dransfield precedent — which has silenced hundreds of watchdogs and whistleblowers.

■ On Sept 11, the U.S. FOIA Advisory Committee will debate “vexatious requests.”
FOIA must judge the request, not the requester.

#FOIA #Transparency #JudicialWatch

Pull-Quote for Journalists

“Once governments start branding citizens as ‘vexatious,’ transparency collapses. FOIA was written to test the request, not blacklist the requester.” — Alan M. Dransfield