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DAILY BRIEFING
December 14, 2005
Bush orders agencies to name chief FOIA officers

By Tom Shoop
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Responding to calls for speeding the process of releasing federal documents to the public, President Bush issued an executive order Wednesday requiring agencies to designate chief Freedom of Information Act officers.

Under the order, FOIA officers must develop plans within six months to streamline their agencies' processes. Those plans must be implemented within two years.

Agencies also must create FOIA requester service centers and designate public liaisons to serve as single points of contact for people seeking documents.

Members of Congress who have pressed the Bush administration to improve the FOIA process praised the order.

"Our oversight has shown is that it's difficult to navigate the process," said Rep. Todd Platts, R-Pa., who chaired a House Government Reform subcommittee on FOIA earlier this year. "Requesters don't have a single point of contact, or someone to call when they run into trouble. The executive order is a broad policy change designed to address these concerns--now agencies must take ownership of improving how they process FOIA requests."

White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan told reporters Wednesday that agencies will be required to take a "close look" at their FOIA operations under the order. "What it does

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is direct agencies to ensure that their process is citizen-centered and results-oriented," McClellan said. "And the goal of it is to help expedite the process and make sure that information is being disclosed in a timely and quick manner."

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According to the Justice Department, agencies spend more than \$300 million annually responding to more than 4 million FOIA requests.

Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis, R-Va., who noted that FOIA requests across government have increased by 71 percent since 2002, said the executive order's provisions "help update the 40-year-old FOIA process to meet the challenges of the 21st century." Davis said his committee would "monitor the agencies as these changes unfold to determine whether additional reform is needed."



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