# IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

SUSAN B. LONG, ET AL.,	)	
Plaintiffs,	)	CV No. 14-109
VS.	)	Washington, D.C. July 29, 2021
IMMIGRATION	)	10:38 a.m.
AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT, ET AL.,	)	
Defendants.	)	

TRANSCRIPT OF STATUS CONFERENCE VIA ZOOM PROCEEDINGS
BEFORE THE HONORABLE AMIT P. MEHTA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

### APPEARANCES:

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Proceedings recorded by mechanical stenography; transcript produced by computer-aided transcription

## PROCEEDINGS 1 2 COURTROOM DEPUTY: Good morning, Your Honor. 3 This is Civil Action 14-109, Susan B. Long, et al., versus 4 Immigration and Customs Enforcement, et al. 5 Scott Nelson and Michael Kirkpatrick for the 6 plaintiffs. 7 Kathleene Molen for the defendants. 8 THE COURT: Okay. Counsel, good morning. I hope 9 everybody is well. 10 So we're back to see where things are and untie 11 this knot. I've reviewed -- at least quickly skimmed the 12 filing that the government made yesterday afternoon, 1.3 I guess, late yesterday afternoon, which includes a sample 14 of two of the data dictionaries that were provided by ICE as 15 samples to the plaintiffs, redactions included, and then 16 there's an affidavit from Ms. De Castro explaining why the 17 redactions have been made. 18 Who would like to begin? 19 Mr. Nelson, do you want to react to the 20 redactions? 21 MR. NELSON: Yes, Your Honor. 2.2. THE COURT: I mean, I think I know what your 23 reaction is going to be, but you might as well put it on the 24 record in your own words and not mine. 25 MR. NELSON: Sure.

I think, you know, the first reaction is that if one looks at the redactions, it's quite evident that they're not in accordance with the Court's opinion.

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Among other things, the declarant says that all full field and table names were redacted, which was not permitted by the Court's opinion. She also says words that are related to the table names were redacted, which is contrary to the testimony of ICE's witness at the evidentiary hearing that said that plain English terms that related to table and field names or plain English translations of those names did not pose problems.

The statements in the declaration about code lookup fields are contrary to the testimony of the witness at the evidentiary hearing, which was that code lookup tables in general were benign because they merely gave translations of the codes used to record data in the fields, and only a few code names might be problematic to the extent that they might somehow reveal linkages among fields and tables. The other redactions, such as the nature of the data recorded in a particular field, are completely contrary to the testimony at the evidentiary hearing, where there was not even any claim that such information would be protected.

And then just stepping back a step further, the fact that these materials date from three years before the search was conducted and doesn't appear that there's any

assurance that they were even complete at the time, and the witness's declaration about how such data dictionaries were prepared by the agency, again, shows that the agency's contention that it didn't need to actually go to the source, the databases, to provide the complete listings of the fields and tables that was current at the time of the search was not correct, and that that search was never adequate.

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I'm not sure what to suggest at this point.

I think one thing that might be productive would be, to the extent that the Court has any doubt about the nature of the redactions, the Court could, at a minimum, require that unredacted copies be provided, as an initial step, to the Court, so that the Court could look at the nature of the information redacted and potentially draw some conclusions about the consistency of the redactions with the Court's opinion.

Another thing, not to belabor a point that has been previously made, is that, you know, it would be our position that the Court should now order the agency to actually provide the complete material from the databases themselves, rather than relying on whatever incomplete versions of the listings of fields and tables happen to be turned up from several years before the search was conducted.

And we had discussed the possibility of bringing

in, if the Court believed it was necessary, requests for

current information into the case. We would need, I think,

to have some opportunity to file a supplemental complaint,

I think, would probably be the correct procedure, and we'd

have to make sure that the requests that that would be based

on were fully exhausted. So we might need a few weeks to

get that step taken.

I think those are my current thoughts based on having had a short period of time to look at the materials that were produced and the government's declaration.

THE COURT: Ms. Molen.

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MS. MOLEN: Yes, Your Honor.

I would like to address the issue of the dates with the data dictionaries.

ICE does not, on a regular basis, just print out data dictionaries. They only do it if they're making updates or changes to these databases. So this is the reason why there aren't these data dictionaries just hanging around; you actually have to have a reason to generate these data dictionaries.

And out of the 18 files that we couldn't read last time, there were some files from 2014. I mean, so they did search for that information in 2014, but it's just they do not generate these data dictionaries unless there is a reason to and if they're creating an update for changes to

1 the database.

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THE COURT: What does it mean to generate a data dictionary? In other words, I mean --

MS. MOLEN: These Excel spreadsheets that --

THE COURT: I know, but are you talking about printing it out or are you talking about some electronic way of producing them?

MS. MOLEN: My understanding is every time they're making a change to this database, they have to record the change — they explained the testing that occurs to the change — and at times when they make these changes, they attach a data dictionary, not always, but sometimes, and these data dictionaries vary in size and — depending on what is being updated in the database.

And so then they have these documents where there are these Excel spreadsheets that are embedded within these documents that represent these data dictionaries. And this is a sample right now that we have of what these data dictionaries look like, and it's basically the Word version of the schema of the database, it's being put in a Word format.

THE COURT: I guess I don't understand that, but let's put that on the back burner for now.

What else would you like to add about what the agency has done here?

MS. MOLEN: Well, I mean, so as far as conducting 1 2 a search of the database now, we don't think that's 3 necessary because we have the records for when the search 4 was conducted in 2014, and these are the dictionaries that 5 were collected at that time. 6 As far as the testimony, I actually spoke to 7 Mr. Smith. Before any of this was produced, I told him, you 8 know, read the opinion, this is what the Court is thinking, 9 this is how the Court wants to see these documents produced 10 to plaintiff. And I was working hand in hand with him when 11 he reviewed these documents, they were reviewed by ICE, and 12 this is what they came up with. 13 THE COURT: Well, Mr. Smith, who testified, was 14 involved in the redaction process? 15 MS. MOLEN: I spoke to Mr. Smith, I told him what 16 you were looking for. He has copies of the transcript. 17 We -- I mean, this is not --18 THE COURT: So my question, Ms. Molen, is: Did 19 Mr. Smith, who testified at the hearing, participate in the 20 redaction process? 21 MS. MOLEN: I don't know -- I don't think he 2.2 actually redacted the record. 23 THE COURT: Yeah, this is the problem, all right? 24 I've got to tell you, I don't want to take this

out on you, Ms. Molen, but you're the one representing the

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agency: It's as if nobody heard a word I had to say last
time we were here. I am literally at a loss right now.

I am at a loss. I have never, in my judicial career, had an

agency respond to a judicial order in the way that ICE has

5 responded to this order in this case.

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The agency had a full and fair opportunity to litigate this thing to the maximum extent available in a FOIA litigation. You submitted declarations. I didn't think the declarations were sufficient. I gave you the opportunity to put somebody on the witness stand. You did. I gave you the opportunity to put somebody on the witness stand under seal and you did. And then I issued a very lengthy written decision, which you have not appealed, okay? You haven't appealed it yet; you have not filed a notice of appeal.

And now you are giving me data dictionaries that are essentially redacted in full. And you're giving me something from Ms. De Castro that is entirely conclusory that just says, well, I talked to a bunch of people and we think this is the stuff that's really law-enforcement sensitive, and we're going to invoke Exemption (b)(7)(E), yet again, and literate — and basically withhold everything from this data dictionary.

So, Ms. Molen, do you think what the agency has produced is consistent with the opinion? Is it consistent

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with all that's happened in these proceedings and what
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    Mr. -- I can't remember what his last name is -- what he
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     testified to at the hearing? Can you make that
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     representation in good faith?
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               MS. MOLEN: But I was not at the hearing.
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               No, I can't.
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               THE COURT: No, but I take it you read the
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     transcript?
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               MS. MOLEN:
                          Yes, but...
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               THE COURT: Is this consistent with what the
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     testimony was and the findings that I made?
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               MS. MOLEN: Your Honor, I --
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               THE COURT: You can say the answer is "no" because
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     that's clearly the answer. It's okay, I'm not blaming you,
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    but the answer is clearly "no." It's clearly "no."
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               You cannot tell me, you cannot tell me that every
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     single one of these lines, every single one of these table
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     names needs to be redacted, consistent with the testimony
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     that came out at that hearing. It just cannot be possible.
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     This is a 95 percent redacted document, and what you've
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     given them is essentially nothing.
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               You know, I think the only thing that I can do
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    here now at this point is I want supervisors and higher-ups
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     on the next conference; otherwise, somebody is getting
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     sanctioned.
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I'm done, I'm really done. I've never lost my

patience with parties ever before, let alone in a FOIA

litigation. The agency wants to re-litigate this case.

Why are you submitting declarations to me at this point?

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We had a hearing.

to be released.

MS. MOLEN: Your Honor, I mean, our understanding is that you wanted a segregability analysis of what needed

THE COURT: I did, but -- you're right, Ms. Molen, I did, but one that was consistent with the findings I made and the testimony.

This is nonsense, all right? You've returned to me a document that is 95 percent redacted. That is not at all consistent with the history of this case, the testimony, and my findings.

This agency produced these very records to this plaintiff for years, and then you all put on somebody on the witness stand, who was cross-examined by Mr. Nelson, who said, yeah, you know, a fair amount of this actually isn't problematic, and the only thing that really concerns me are the things that might create linkages between these databases — or between these tables.

And you have now redacted everything, every single table name, every single attribute of that table name, every field name, which is entirely inconsistent. And it is not

my job as a Federal Judge to get these documents and figure
this out. It's yours and your agency's.

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So here's what I'm going to do. Ms. Molen, you are going to make sure that the next hearing we have, which is going to be in a week, has somebody at the U.S. Attorney's Office who's a supervisor and somebody who's a higher-up at ICE, who can respond to what is happening in this case.

I'm not doing this anymore, because otherwise you all are going to get sanctioned. And I don't know how one really sanctions a federal agency. It's not like you can sanction them in a way that you sanction a party, like money is really going to matter to a federal agency. But you're going to get sanctioned unless something starts happening in this matter that is consistent with what has happened in this case.

I don't understand this. You are thumbing your nose at what has happened in this case. This case was filed in 2014 and you want to re-litigate it in 2021. You can't do that. If you think I'm wrong, file your Notice of Appeal, although it's probably too late. I don't know whether it is or not. File your Notice of Appeal and go up to the D.C. Circuit. Stop wasting everybody's time.

MS. MOLEN: I mean, we understood from your opinion that you wanted something from us and it was the

segregability analysis, and that's what we've been trying -THE COURT: No, Ms. Molen.

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What I wanted was a segregability analysis that
was consistent with the findings I made about what kind of
disclosures would or would not create a risk of law
enforcement compromise. That's what I asked you to do.
I didn't ask you to just go through and start redacting
things and say, ha, here you go, here's a segregability
analysis. That's not what I asked you to do. I wrote
35 pages telling you what to do and you haven't done it, you
haven't done it.

I don't act this way with parties, I really don't,
I try not to do this, but you all have really tried my
patience. I don't know what more to do and I don't know
what more to say other than escalating this to people who
will actually understand that when a court actually rules on
something, that that order should be followed. This is just
unbelievable. It's unbelievable.

Are you all available next Wednesday at 3:00 p.m.?

MS. MOLEN: Yes, Your Honor.

MR. NELSON: Yes, Your Honor. Sorry, I was trying to find the unmute button. Yes.

THE COURT: Okay.

Ms. Molen, you know, whether it's the head of the Civil Division, who I think is probably the appropriate

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     person to have on this call on this next hearing, and
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     whoever it is at the agency in the general counsel's office
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     that can actually respond to meaningful questions from the
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     Court, need to be on this next call, this next hearing,
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     okay?
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               MS. MOLEN:
                           Okay.
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               THE COURT:
                           Thank you, all.
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               MR. NELSON: Thank you, Your Honor.
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               (Proceedings concluded at 10:56 a.m.)
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## C E R T I F I C A T E

I, William P. Zaremba, RMR, CRR, certify that the foregoing is a correct transcript from the record of proceedings in the above-titled matter.

Please note: This hearing occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and is therefore subject to the technological limitations of court reporting remotely.

Date:\_\_July 29, 2021\_\_\_\_\_\_/S/\_\_William P. Zaremba\_\_\_\_\_ William P. Zaremba, RMR, CRR

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