

THE NATIONAL SECURITY LETTER SEAMUS HUGHES FOUND WHEN LOOKING FOR A DAN RICHMAN DOCKET

Not long after something happened in November to prevent four Dan Richman dockets from being unsealed in DC District, Judge Anthony Trenga ordered a docket about a National Security Letter from the same period as the Dan Richman investigation (which he referred in 2019 to then Magistrate Judge Michael Nachmanoff) to be unsealed.

Both the four Dan Richman dockets and the NSL docket remain substantially sealed.

As I have laid out before, when Magistrate Judge William Fitzpatrick first held a hearing about DOJ's bid to breach Jim Comey's privilege on November 5, he started the hearing by focusing on all the sealed documents. When he asked Loaner AUSA Tyler Lemons about the status of the underlying warrants, Lemons equivocated.

THE COURT: Mr. Lemons, what's the status of that?

MR. LEMONS: Thank you, Your Honor. Your Honor, we have made a request to the issuing district as to those search warrants, for them to be unsealed. My understanding, last speaking with an AUSA in that district, is that motion has not been filed at this time. They are preparing to provide notice to other potentially interested parties, per their practice and the rules they have to abide by in that district. So we requested it, and our understanding is at this time that the warrants all

remain completely under seal. That is the only reason why the government designated these search warrants as protected material and filed them under seal and understands why the defense filed them under seal. If it was in my power and ability here today, those search warrants would be totally unsealed. [my emphasis]

After the hearing Fitzpatrick ordered that the parties take steps to unseal both the underlying warrant dockets and the sealed filings about them.

ORDERED that the Government shall, on or before November 10, 2025, move in the issuing district to unseal the four 2019 and 2020 search warrants referenced in the Government's Reply to Defendant's Response to the Government's Motion for Implementation of Filter Protocol (ECF 132), together with all attendant documents, or, in the alternative, file a motion in the issuing district setting forth good cause as to why the subject search warrants and all attendant documents should remain under seal, in whole or in part; and it is further

[snip]

ORDERED that, if necessary, the Court shall hold a hearing on the pending motions to seal (ECFs 56, 72, 109, and 133) on November 21, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in Courtroom 500, and the materials subject to those motions shall remain UNDER SEAL until further order of the Court; and it is further

ORDERED that, to the extent the Government seeks to seal Exhibit A to Defendant's Response to the Government's Motion for Expedited Ruling (ECF No. 55-1), the Government shall file a supporting brief in accordance with

Local Criminal Rule 49 on or before November 12, 2025; Defendant may file a response on or before November 19, 2025; and, if necessary, the Court shall hold a hearing on the Government's sealing request on November 21, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in Courtroom 500;

Over a month ago, by November 10, the Loaner AUSAs in EDVA should have filed to unseal the four warrant dockets in DC or they should have filed a motion in DC "setting forth good cause as to why the subject search warrants and all attendant documents should remain under seal."

If the Loaner AUSAs followed that order, it would seem to suggest someone insisted on keeping the dockets in DC sealed.

Fitzpatrick listed those dockets in a footnote of his November 17 opinion (that is, a week after DOJ would have had to file to keep everything sealed) granting Comey access to the grand jury transcripts in his case.

2 Search warrant 19-sw-182 was issued on August 27, 2019, and authorized the search of Mr. Richman's hard drive from February 1, 2017 to April 30, 2017. ECF 89-1.

Search warrant 19-sc-2097 was issued on October 22, 2019, and authorized the search of Mr. Richman's Columbia University and Law School email accounts from March 1, 2016 to May 30, 2017. ECF 89-2.

Search warrant 20-sw-200 was issued on January 31, 2020, and authorized the search of Mr. Richman's iCloud account from March 1, 2016 to May 30, 2017. ECF 89-3. Attachment B to the warrant specifically limits the information to be seized to "non-privileged communications." Id.

Search warrant 20-sw-143 was issued on

June 4, 2020, and authorized the search of the backup files for Mr. Richman's iPad and iPhone from March 1, 2016 to May 30, 2017. ECF 89-4. Attachment B to the warrant specifically limits the information to be seized to "non-privileged communications." Id.

I just checked. They're still sealed.

Date	Warrant	Target	Dates	Actual Range
August 27, 2019	DC 19-sw-182	Hard drive	February 1, 2017 to April 30, 2017	February 1, 2017 to June 10, 2017
October 22, 2019	DC 19-sc-2097	Columbia email accounts	March 1, 2016 to May 30, 2017	
November 22, 2019		Richman interview		
December 23, 2019	EDVA 19-cv-01608	NSL Docket opened		
January 31, 2020	DC 20-sw-200	iCloud account	March 1, 2016 to May 30, 2017	March 1, 2016 to August 13, 2019
April 1, 2020	EDVA 19-cv-01608	NSL Docket terminated		
June 4, 2020	DC 20-sw-143	iPhone and iPad backup	March 1, 2016 to May 30, 2017	
June 29, 2021		Comey shares phone		
November 5, 2025	EDVA 25-cr-00272	Filter Protocol Hearing		
November 10, 2025		Deadline to unseal DC dockets		
November 14, 2025	EDVA 19-cv-01608	DOJ submits filing		
December 10, 2025	EDVA 19-cv-01608	Trenga orders docket unsealed		

Some weeks ago, I did what any resourceful person would do to try to solve a docket mystery: I asked Seamus Hughes (of CourtWatch fame) if he could find anything.

He didn't find any docket at DC asking to keep the files sealed.

What he did find is at least as interesting.

He found a docket, described as National Security Letter 19-498157 and listing Bill Barr as the defendant, which was originally referred to Michael Nachmanoff when he was a Magistrate Judge, with a recent update. On December 10, Judge Anthony Trenga, citing a response from DOJ on November 14 (which is sealed), ordered the docket about a 2019-2020 National Security Letter to be unsealed.

Aside from that order though, it remains substantially sealed.

This docket may be totally unrelated to the Comey case.

But the table above shows how neatly the two overlap. The NSL docket was opened a month after a Dan Richman interview in November 2019, and it was closed before DOJ obtained warrants to seize

the iPhone which they've since been snooping into.

Maybe Santa can help us unwrap this in time for Christmas.