

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 27

To amend chapter 3 of title 5, United States Code, to require the publication of settlement agreements, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 4, 2021

Mr. PALMER (for himself, Mr. TAYLOR, Mr. COOPER, and Mr. CONNOLLY) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Reform, and in addition to the Committee on the Budget, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To amend chapter 3 of title 5, United States Code, to require the publication of settlement agreements, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Settlement Agreement
5 Information Database Act of 2021”.

1 **SEC. 2. INFORMATION REGARDING SETTLEMENT AGREE-**
2 **MENTS ENTERED INTO BY FEDERAL AGEN-**
3 **CIES.**

4 (a) REQUIREMENTS FOR SETTLEMENT AGREE-
5 MENTS.—Chapter 3 of title 5, United States Code, is
6 amended by adding at the end the following new section:

7 **“§ 307. Information regarding settlement agreements**

8 “(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

9 “(1) LOCAL GOVERNMENT.—The term ‘local
10 government’ has the meaning given that term in sec-
11 tion 6501 of title 31.

12 “(2) ORDER TYPE.—The term ‘order type’
13 means the type of action or instrument used to set-
14 tle a civil or criminal judicial action.

15 “(3) SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT.—The term
16 ‘settlement agreement’ means a settlement agree-
17 ment (including a consent decree) that—

18 “(A) is entered into by an Executive agen-
19 cy; and

20 “(B) relates to an alleged violation of Fed-
21 eral civil or criminal law.

22 “(4) STATE.—The term ‘State’ means each of
23 the several States, the District of Columbia, each
24 territory or possession of the United States, and
25 each federally recognized Indian Tribe.

1 “(b) SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT INFORMATION
2 DATABASE.—

3 “(1) EXECUTIVE AGENCY REQUIREMENT.—

4 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subpara-
5 graph (B), the head of each Executive agency
6 shall, in accordance with guidance issued pursu-
7 ant to paragraph (2), submit the following in-
8 formation to the database established under
9 paragraph (3):

10 “(i) A list of each settlement agree-
11 ment, in a categorized and searchable for-
12 mat, entered into by the Executive agency,
13 as a party to a lawsuit, which shall in-
14 clude, for each settlement agreement—

15 “(I) the order type of the settle-
16 ment agreement;

17 “(II) the date on which the par-
18 ties entered into the settlement agree-
19 ment;

20 “(III) a list of specific violations
21 that specify the basis for the action
22 taken, with a description of the claims
23 each party settled under the settle-
24 ment agreement;

1 “(IV) the amount of attorneys’
2 fees and other litigation costs award-
3 ed, if any, including a description of
4 the statutory basis for such an award;

5 “(V) the amount each party set-
6 tling a claim under the settlement
7 agreement is obligated to pay under
8 the settlement agreement;

9 “(VI) the total amount the set-
10 tling parties are obligated to pay
11 under the settlement agreement;

12 “(VII) the amount, if any, the
13 settling party is obligated to pay that
14 is expressly specified under the settle-
15 ment agreement as a civil or criminal
16 penalty or fine;

17 “(VIII) any payment made under
18 the settlement agreement, including a
19 description of any payment made to
20 the Federal Government;

21 “(IX) the projected duration of
22 the settlement agreement, if available;

23 “(X) a list of State or local gov-
24 ernments that may be directly af-

1 fected by the terms of the settlement
2 agreement;

3 “(XI) a brief description of any
4 economic data and methodology used
5 to justify the terms of the settlement
6 agreement;

7 “(XII) any modifications to the
8 settlement agreement, when applica-
9 ble;

10 “(XIII) notice and comments,
11 when applicable; and

12 “(XIV) whether the settlement
13 agreement is still under judicial en-
14 forcement and any period of time by
15 which the parties agreed to have cer-
16 tain conditions met.

17 “(ii) A copy of each—

18 “(I) settlement agreement en-
19 tered into by the Executive agency;
20 and

21 “(II) statement issued under
22 paragraph (4).

23 “(B) NONDISCLOSURE.—The requirement
24 to submit information or a copy of a settlement
25 agreement under subparagraph (A) shall not

1 apply to the extent the information or copy (or
2 portion thereof)—

3 “(i) is subject to a confidentiality pro-
4 vision that prohibits disclosure of the infor-
5 mation or copy (or portion thereof); and

6 “(ii) would not be disclosed under sec-
7 tion 552, if the Executive agency provides
8 a citation to the applicable exemption.

9 “(C) CLARIFICATION OF RESPONSIBLE
10 AGENCY.—In a case in which an Executive
11 agency is acting at the request or on behalf of
12 another Executive agency (referred to as the
13 originating agency), the originating agency is
14 responsible for submitting information under
15 subparagraph (A).

16 “(2) GUIDANCE.—The Director of the Office of
17 Management and Budget shall issue guidance for
18 Executive agencies to implement paragraph (1).
19 Such guidance shall include the following:

20 “(A) Specific dates by which submissions
21 must be made, not less than twice a year.

22 “(B) Data standards, including common
23 data elements and a common, nonproprietary,
24 searchable, machine-readable, platform inde-
25 pendent format.

1 “(C) A requirement that the information
2 and documents required under paragraph (1)
3 are publicly available for a period starting on
4 the date of the settlement through not less than
5 5 years after the termination of the settlement
6 agreement.

7 “(3) ESTABLISHMENT OF DATABASE.—The Di-
8 rector of the Office of Management and Budget, or
9 the head of an Executive agency designated by the
10 Director, shall establish and maintain a public,
11 searchable, downloadable database for Executive
12 agencies to directly upload and submit the informa-
13 tion and documents required under paragraph (1)
14 for immediate publication online.

15 “(4) STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY.—If
16 the head of an Executive agency determines that a
17 confidentiality provision in a settlement agreement,
18 or the sealing of a settlement agreement, is required
19 to protect the public interest of the United States,
20 the head of the Executive agency may except the
21 settlement agreement from the requirement in para-
22 graph (1) and shall issue a written public statement
23 stating why such action is required to protect the
24 public interest of the United States, which shall ex-
25 plain—

1 “(A) what interests confidentiality pro-
2 tects; and

3 “(B) why the interests protected by con-
4 fidentiality outweigh the public’s interest in
5 knowing about the conduct of the Federal Gov-
6 ernment and the expenditure of Federal re-
7 sources.”.

8 (b) TECHNICAL AND CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—
9 The table of sections for chapter 3 of title 5, United States
10 Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new
11 item:

“307. Information regarding settlement agreements.”.

12 (c) DEADLINE TO ESTABLISH DATABASE.—Not later
13 than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this Act,
14 the Director of the Office of Management and Budget
15 shall issue guidance required by section 307(b)(2) of title
16 5, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), and
17 establish the settlement agreement information database
18 required by section 307(b)(3) of title 5, United States
19 Code, as added by subsection (a).

20 (d) DEADLINE FOR FIRST SUBMISSION.—Not later
21 than 90 days after the Director issues guidance under sec-
22 tion 307(b)(2) of title 5, United States Code, as added
23 by subsection (a), the head of each Executive agency (as
24 defined in section 105 of title 5, United States Code) shall

1 begin submitting information to the database established
2 under such section 307.

3 **SEC. 3. AMENDMENTS TO THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION**
4 **ACT.**

5 Section 552(a)(2) of title 5, United States Code, is
6 amended—

7 (1) by redesignating subparagraphs (B)
8 through (E) as subparagraphs (C) through (F), re-
9 spectively; and

10 (2) by inserting after subparagraph (A) the fol-
11 lowing new subparagraph:

12 “(B) each settlement agreement (as defined in
13 section 307) entered into by an Executive agency,
14 with redactions for information that the agency may
15 withhold under paragraph (8) and subsections (b)
16 and (c) of this section;”.

17 **SEC. 4. RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.**

18 Nothing in this Act, or the amendments made by this
19 Act, shall be construed to require the disclosure of infor-
20 mation or records that any agency may properly withhold
21 from public disclosure under section 552 of title 5, United
22 States Code (commonly known as the “Freedom of Infor-
23 mation Act”).

1 **SEC. 5. EFFECTIVE DATE; APPLICABILITY.**

2 This Act shall be effective 180 days after the date
3 of the enactment of this Act and shall apply—

4 (1) with respect to any settlement agreement
5 (as such term is defined in section 307 of title 5,
6 United States Code, as added by section 2), entered
7 into on or after the date of the enactment of this
8 Act; and

9 (2) to the extent practicable, any such settle-
10 ment agreement (as such term is defined in section
11 307 of title 5, United States Code, as added by sec-
12 tion 2) that remains in effect on or after the date
13 of the enactment of this Act.

14 **SEC. 6. DETERMINATION OF BUDGETARY EFFECTS.**

15 The budgetary effects of this Act, for the purpose of
16 complying with the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010,
17 shall be determined by reference to the latest statement
18 titled “Budgetary Effects of PAYGO Legislation” for this
19 Act, submitted for printing in the Congressional Record
20 by the Chairman of the House Budget Committee, pro-
21 vided that such statement has been submitted prior to the
22 vote on passage.

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