



February 13, 2026

Don R. Berthiaume
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Justice
Office of the Inspector General
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

RE: Request for Investigation – Attorney General Pam Bondi’s Coercive Demand for Minnesota Voter Registration Records and Related Abuse of DOJ Authority

Dear Acting Inspector General Berthiaume:

Democracy Defenders Fund (DDF) respectfully requests that the U.S. Department of Justice (“DOJ”) Office of the Inspector General (“OIG”) investigate whether Attorney General Pam Bondi and other Department officials engaged in misconduct, abuse of authority, and violations of law and DOJ policy by attempting to coerce the State of Minnesota into repealing state and local “sanctuary” laws, handing over Minnesota’s statewide Medicaid and Food and Nutrition Service program records, and voter registration records (“voter rolls”) to the federal government through the veiled threat of violent and deadly immigration enforcement.

Background

On January 24, 2026, Attorney General Pam Bondi transmitted a three-page letter to Minnesota Governor Tim Walz asserting that federal intervention was necessary to “restore the rule of law” and “bring an end to the chaos” in Minnesota. In that letter, she set forth three conditions directed at the State: (1) provision of Minnesota’s statewide voter registration database to the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division to “confirm that Minnesota’s voter registration practices comply with federal law.”; (2) repeal of Minnesota’s “sanctuary” policies; and (3) disclosure of state social-insurance records, including Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program data.¹ The first demand, federal access to Minnesota’s voter roll data, is the central focus of this complaint.² It is extraordinary in scope and legally suspect—and implicates foundational constitutional principles governing federalism, state sovereignty, and the administration of elections.

1. Deadly Public Violence Caused by Deployed Federal Agents

¹ Pam Bondi, [Letter to Minnesota Governor Tim Walz](#), NY Times (Jan. 24, 2026).

² While the focus of this complaint is on DOJ’s demand that Minnesota turn over its voter rolls to the Federal government, many of the concerns raised in this letter apply to the additional requests set forth in Bondi’s letter.

The letter was sent against the backdrop of Operation Metro Surge, a deadly large-scale federal immigration enforcement blitz involving thousands of ICE, Customs and Border Protection, and other Department of Homeland Security agents concentrated in the Minneapolis–Saint Paul region.³ During the course of this operation, two U.S. citizens were killed by federal agents—37-year-old Renee Good on January 7 and 37-year-old ICU nurse Alex Pretti on January 24—and numerous other civilians have been wounded or otherwise adversely affected.⁴ These incidents coupled with the ongoing federalization in the state, has intensified public outcry and heightened tensions pertaining to the scope, conduct, and legitimacy of federal enforcement activity in Minnesota.

Minnesota state leaders have publicly opposed the operation as an unlawful federal intrusion inconsistent with constitutional limits on federal authority.⁵ Governor Tim Walz described the enforcement as part of “a campaign of organized brutality against the people of Minnesota by our own federal government,” condemned it as “not common sense, lawful immigration enforcement,” and called for the deployment to end.⁶ Minnesota officials have also challenged the operation in federal court, asserting that the scale and conduct of the deployment violate the Tenth Amendment and related federalism principles by commandeering state resources and undermining local public safety.⁷

It was in this extraordinarily heated environment that Attorney General Bondi advanced her demand for access to Minnesota’s voter registration database.

2. *Invasive Voter Data Demands to Abate Deadly Violence*

Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon publicly rejected the request from Bondi, describing it as an “outrageous attempt to coerce Minnesota into giving the federal government

³ Camilo Montoya-Galvez & Joe Walsh, Minneapolis Becomes Ground Zero in Trump’s Immigration Crackdown: Arrests, Protests and 2 Fatal Shootings by Agents, CBS News (Jan. 26, 2026), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/minneapolis-trump-immigration-ice-border-patrol-arrests-protests-shootings/>.

⁴ Reg Chapman, Minneapolis Couple Says ICE Released Tear Gas Under Their Family Vehicle With 6 Children Inside, CBS Minn. (Jan. 16, 2026), <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/ice-tear-gassed-family-vehicle-with-6-children-inside/>.

⁵ Press Release, Attorney General Ellison and cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul sue to halt ICE surge into Minnesota, Off. of Minn. Atty Gen. (Jan. 12, 2026), https://www.ag.state.mn.us/Office/Communications/2026/01/12_ICE.asp; Mitch Smith, Man Killed by Federal Agents in Minneapolis Was Holding a Phone, Not a Gun, NY Times (Jan. 25, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2026/01/24/us/minneapolis-shooting-ice>.

⁶ Associated Press, A Man Fatally Shot by a Federal Officer in Minnesota Worked as an ICU Nurse, His Parents Say, WUNC (Jan. 24, 2026), <https://www.wunc.org/term/news/2026-01-24/person-has-been-shot-killed-federal-officers-minnesota-immigration-crackdown>; see also Stephen Swanson, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz tells Trump: “You clearly underestimated the people of this state and nation”, CBS News (last updated Jan. 25, 2026), <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/tim-walz-donald-trump-immigration-surge-ice-border-patrol-alex-pretti/>.

⁷ Press Release, State of Minnesota, Minneapolis and Saint Paul sue to halt ICE surge into Minnesota, City of Minneapolis (Jan. 12, 2026), <https://www.minneapolismn.gov/news/2026/january/ag-lawsuit/#:~:text=The%20coalition%20alleges%20that%20DHS,that%20DHS%20agents%20have%20caused.>

private data on millions of U.S. Citizens".⁸ Secretary Simon's response confirmed that the information sought includes non-public voter data the State considers legally protected, underscoring the coercive nature of the demand as opposed to a routine or voluntary request.

Minnesota's statewide voter-registration database is a core component of the State's election infrastructure and contains highly sensitive personally identifiable information concerning millions of eligible voters. That information includes, but is not limited to, full names, residential addresses, dates of birth, and, in many systems, special "private" classifications for protected individuals whose safety depends on confidentiality.⁹ Minnesota officials have emphasized that state law affirmatively requires this data to be safeguarded and prohibits its disclosure absent a lawful process.¹⁰

Request for Investigation

The DOJ's letter operates, in both form and substance, as an unlawful federal demand for statewide voter-registration data, untethered to any established legal process and without statutory grounding. The combination of deadly federal immigration enforcement, public outrage for unprovoked citizen deaths by federal agents, and the timing and substance of the DOJ's demand for personal voter data contextualize the unethical and unlawful concerns in this complaint.

This conduct presents grave legal and institutional concerns that warrant immediate investigation by the OIG. At its core, this matter involves: (1) the unlawful attempt to obtain access to voter registration data protected by state and federal law; (2) the coercive misuse of federal law-enforcement authority to override state sovereignty; and (3) the foreseeable and substantial harm to voter participation and the integrity of election administration.

Of particular significance, this is not a routine intergovernmental data request. Historically, DOJ election-related record access occurs through narrow, legally defined channels, subject to adequate oversight mechanisms and confidentiality protections.¹¹ By contrast, the demand for Minnesota's voter rolls sought to compel disclosure to the federal government through the veiled threat of violent immigration enforcement.

I. Unlawful demand for access to protected state voter-registration data

Similar to most state databases, Minnesota's voter-registration system contains highly sensitive personally identifiable information concerning millions of citizens. Both Minnesota law and federal precedent make it clear that disclosure of this information is prohibited absent lawful

⁸ Press Release, Statement from Secretary Simon, Off. of Minn. Sec'y of State, (Jan. 25, 2026), <https://www.sos.mn.gov/about-the-office/news-room/statement-from-secretary-simon/>.

⁹ Minn. Rev. Code § 201.091 (2025); *see also* Minn. Rev. Code § 13.02.

¹⁰ *See generally The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act*, in CHS Administration Handbook (last updated July 25, 2025), <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/practice/resources/chsadmin/data-mgdpa.html>.

¹¹ Gowri Ramachandran, Requests for Access to Election Data and Equipment Require Balancing Risks and Public Access, Brennan Ctr. for Justice (last updated June 27, 2025), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/requests-access-election-data-and-equipment-require-balancing-risks-and>.

process and specific statutory authorization.¹² Bondi’s DOJ demand was made without a subpoena, without a court order, and without any judicial process whatsoever. Nor was it grounded in any clearly articulated statutory authority. Instead, it sought unlimited access to a statewide election infrastructure system generated, maintained, and safeguarded under state and federal laws.

To the extent federal law permits any inspection of voter-registration records, it does so in carefully circumscribed terms. The National Voter Registration Act, the Help America Vote Act, and the Civil Rights Act of 1960 (CRA) regulate the creation and maintenance of voter-registration systems and, in carefully defined contexts, allows access to certain records for compliance or enforcement purposes.¹³

Therefore, the U.S. Attorney General’s attempt to invoke the CRA as a basis for sweeping access to Minnesota’s voter database is legally indefensible.¹⁴ The CRA provides that the Attorney General must provide a “statement of the basis and the purpose” of any demand for records.¹⁵ Bondi’s argument that the voter rolls will allow the DOJ to “confirm that Minnesota’s voter registration practices comply with federal law” is nothing but a fishing expedition and does not constitute a statement of “basis” and “purpose” of disclosure as required by the law.¹⁶ It identifies no specific statutory violation, no jurisdictional focus, no time frame, and no discriminatory practice under investigation. Courts have rejected similarly open-ended justifications, finding CRA-based inspection demands invalid where the Attorney General failed to articulate a concrete enforcement predicate.¹⁷

Consistent with that purpose, the CRA has traditionally been used to inspect specific registration practices or localized records as part of enforcing anti-discrimination protections.¹⁸ Congress did not enact the CRA to convey sweeping authority to the executive branch to compel disclosure of entire statewide voter rolls. And it certainly does not authorize the executive branch to leverage unrelated federal enforcement powers to coerce a sovereign State into surrendering control of its protected election data. As a matter of law and practice, Bondi’s request stands in sharp contrast to the historical use of the Attorney General’s voter roll review authorities under the CRA.

Federal courts repeatedly rejected efforts by the DOJ to compel precisely this type of access.¹⁹ In California, a federal district court dismissed the DOJ’s voter-roll lawsuit after

¹² Minn. Rev. Code § 13.03(3) (2025); Federal Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. § 552a.

¹³ See e.g. National Voter Registration Act of 1993, 52 U.S.C. § 20501 et seq. (NVRA); see also Karen L. Shanton, Cong. Rsch. Serv., R46949, The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA): Overview and Ongoing Role in Election Administration Policy (2025), <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R46949>, (“Congress’s response to those findings, in HAVA, spanned a correspondingly wide range of elections topics, from voting systems to voter identification to the accessibility of the electoral process to individuals with disabilities); see also Civil Rights Act of 1960, Pub. L. 86-449 (1960) (CRA).

¹⁴ Bondi, *supra*. note 1.

¹⁵ 52 U.S.C. § 20703.

¹⁶ Bondi, *supra*. note 1.

¹⁷ *United States v. State of Oregon*, No. 6:25-cv-01666, ECF No. 73 (D. Or. Feb. 5, 2026).

¹⁸ Sturkey, *supra*. note 16.

¹⁹ See *U.S. v. Weber*, No. 2:25-cv-09149, ECF No. 128 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 15, 2026); *U.S. v. State of Oregon*, No. 6:25-cv-01666-MTK, ECF No. 73 (D. Or. Feb. 5, 2026).

concluding that the demand for unredacted voter data raised serious privacy concerns and exceeded the Department's legal authority.²⁰ In Oregon, a federal judge similarly indicated that the DOJ's attempt to obtain unredacted statewide voter information was unlikely to satisfy the legal standards governing compelled disclosure.²¹ These decisions reflect a consistent judicial refusal to recognize any generalized, broad executive authority to commandeer state-maintained voter-registration databases.

Against that backdrop, the DOJ's attempt to obtain Minnesota's voter data outside the judicial process is troubling. It shows an effort to secure through intimidation what Bondi's DOJ cannot obtain through the courts.

II. Abuse of Executive authority through coercive leverage

The conduct described constitutes an abuse of executive authority through the use of coercive threats to obtain an outcome the executive branch has no lawful power to demand. Election administration is a core sovereign function of the States prescribed by the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.²² Furthermore, Article I, Section 4 confirms that authority, permitting alteration of state election regulations only by Congress—not by executive fiat.²³ The executive branch therefore lacks any lawful basis to obtain state election data through coercion, conditional threats, or the deployment of force.

The Constitution commits the regulation of immigration to the federal government, with Congress exercising primary authority to set immigration law—a power the Supreme Court has described as plenary.²⁴ The executive therefore enforces immigration law only to the extent Congress has authorized it by statute and must operate within the statutory framework Congress has prescribed, which defines the scope and purpose of immigration enforcement, including authority over arrest, detention, and investigation within the immigration context.²⁵

Those statutes and case law do not grant the DOJ or the Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) authority to weaponize immigration enforcement to compel state governments

²⁰ Judge Dismisses Justice Department Lawsuit Seeking Detailed California Voter Information, AP News (Jan. 15, 2026),

<https://apnews.com/article/california-voter-data-justice-department-lawsuit-0305190ba958051bb86741ac00da36a7>.

²¹ Claire Rush, Federal Judge Dismisses Justice Department Lawsuit Seeking Oregon's Voter Rolls, KLCC (Jan. 27, 2026),

<https://www.klcc.org/politics-government/2026-01-27/federal-judge-dismisses-justice-department-lawsuit-seeking-oregons-voter-rolls>; see also Press Release, Win for Oregonians: Judge Dismisses DOJ Lawsuit Seeking to Seize Private Voter Data, League of Women Voters (last updated: Jan. 27, 2026), <https://www.lwv.org/newsroom/press-releases/win-oregonians-judge-dismisses-doj-lawsuit-seeking-seize-private-voter-data>.

²² U.S. Const. amend. X.

²³ U.S. Const. art. I, § 4, cl. 1.

²⁴ *Oceanic Steam Navigation Co. v. Stranahan*, 214 U.S. 320, 343 (1909) ("Congress is granted by Art. I, § 8 of the Constitution plenary power to regulate the bringing of aliens to our shores; and its acts within that field are valid unless they violate some explicit restriction of the Constitution.")

²⁵ See *Galvan v. Press*, 347 U.S. 522, 530 (1954) (Policies pertaining to the entry of aliens and their right to remain here are peculiarly concerned with the political conduct of the government. In the enforcement of these policies, the Executive Branch of the Government must respect the procedural safeguards of due process).

to surrender control over unrelated sovereign functions such as election administration. Yet that is precisely what occurred here. By conditioning the scope of federal immigration enforcement on Minnesota's acquiescence to data demands, the U.S. Attorney General repurposed a limited statutory authority into a tool of political and institutional coercion. That approach operates as a coercive form of intergovernmental pressure that untethers immigration enforcement from its ordinary statutory role. Even accepting the federal government's broad authority in the immigration sphere, using immigration enforcement in this manner raises serious concerns about the federal-state balance Congress has intentionally chosen to preserve.

The unprecedented nature of this coercive conduct was reinforced by a coalition of 23 state attorneys general, who formally condemned the Attorney General's January 24 correspondence as an unlawful escalation of federal power.²⁶ Their letter warned that the federal demands are "inconsistent with fundamental principles of our federal system," and that conditioning federal cooperation on state compliance with sweeping data and policy requests represents an "intrusion on state sovereignty."²⁷

Perhaps most troubling, this demand was not presented as a neutral request grounded in statutory authority, judicial process, or good-faith conflict resolution. Instead, it was embedded in a broader set of federal conditions tied to a deadly, inhumane immigration enforcement deployment in Minnesota, an operation that has already been marked by multiple fatal shootings of U.S. citizens and widespread criticisms from state and local officials.

The delivery of this demand came in the midst of Minnesota's active legal resistance to federal deployment—including lawsuits and alleging violations of the Tenth Amendment and other constitutional rights—and a growing community outcry over the human cost of these federal actions. The message from the DOJ is unmistakable: acquiesce or continue suffering fatal consequences. That is not intergovernmental cooperation. It is coercion.

III. Threat to voter participation and election integrity

Beyond the questions of authority and voter privacy, Bondi's demand for Minnesota's voter registration data poses a direct and substantial threat to voter participation and the integrity of election administration.

When the federal government signals that voter registration data may be accessed, centralized, or repurposed by law-enforcement agencies, the foreseeable and unavoidable consequence is voter intimidation.²⁸ Voters may reasonably conclude that registering to vote, updating registration information, or otherwise participating in the electoral process may expose

²⁶ State Attorney General Letter, Off. of N.Y State Att'y Gen., to Attorney General Bondi and Secretary Noem, Re. Condemning DOJ Threats Against Minnesota (Jan. 29, 2026),

https://www.njoag.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/2026-0129_AG-Letter-to-Bondi-Noem.pdf

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ See Jen Fifield, Details of DHS Agreement Reveal Risks of Trump Administration's Use of Social Security Data for Voter Citizenship Checks, ProPublica (Oct. 30, 2025),

<https://www.propublica.org/article/dhs-social-security-data-voter-citizenship-trump>.

them to surveillance, investigation, or collateral consequences unrelated to voting itself.²⁹ That perception alone is sufficient to suppress and minimize participation.

This chilling effect falls most heavily on populations already vulnerable to government scrutiny, including naturalized citizens, immigrant communities, mixed-status families, and communities of color.³⁰ For these groups, the linkage between voter databases and federal enforcement operations is not abstract; it is a concrete signal that exercising the right to vote may entail personal risk. The predictable result—perhaps by design—is reduced registration, disengagement, and voter withdrawal altogether.³¹

Federal courts have long recognized that government actions burdening registration or voting, even indirectly, implicate fundamental constitutional rights and must be subject to heightened scrutiny.³² Likewise, Congress has enacted federal civil-rights and voting-rights safeguards to prevent this form of intimidation and structural exclusion.³³

In an effort to leverage excessive immigration enforcement to accomplish an entirely unrelated objective, the DOJ conveyed that voter information is a tool of federal enforcement rather than a protected component of democratic participation.³⁴ That message undermines public confidence in the neutrality of election administration, erodes trust in state and federal institutions, and threatens the legitimacy of our electoral system.

If permitted to stand, this conduct has the potential to establish a dangerous precedent: that a presidential administration may obtain control over state election infrastructure not through legislation or judicial process, but through coercion. Such a precedent would weaken voter-privacy regimes nationwide, invite future exploitation of voter databases for partisan purposes, and fundamentally alter how Americans experience the act of voting.

²⁹ Julie Carr Smyth, The GOP stoked fears of noncitizens voting. Cases in Ohio show how rhetoric and reality diverge, Assoc. Press (Dec. 15, 2024),

<https://www.propublica.org/article/dhs-social-security-data-voter-citizenship-trump>; Walter Olson, Shedding Light on the Incidence of Illegal Non-citizen Voting, Cato Inst. (May 22, 2024), <https://www.cato.org/blog/shedding-light-incidence-illegal-noncitizen-voting>.

³⁰ American Elections Are Secure: Dangerous Anti-Immigrant Falsehoods Are Attempts to Suppress Votes by Millions of Latinos and Other Eligible Voters, Unidos US (Aug. 21, 2024), <https://unidosus.org/publications/why-allegations-of-non-citizen-voting-are-dangerous-to-democracy-latino-voters-and-the-latino-community/>.

³¹ Kevin Morris, et al., Study Reveals the Lasting Voter Suppression Effects of Restrictive Texas Law, Brennan Center for Justice (May 28, 2025), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/study-reveals-lasting-voter-suppression-effects-restrictive-texas-law>.

³² See Legal Tests Used in Voting Cases, Democracy Docket (June 7, 2023) (The Supreme Court ruled in *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964) that since the right to vote is “preservative of other basic civil and political rights, any alleged infringement of the right of citizens to vote must be carefully and meticulously scrutinized.”), <https://www.democracydocket.com/analysis/legal-tests-used-in-voting-cases/#:~:text=One%20year%20before%20Congress%20passed,to%20a%20compelling%20government%20interest>.

³³ See e.g. NVRA, *supra*. note 13.

³⁴ U.S. Const. amend. XIV (equal protection & due process), XV (prohibits racial discrimination), XVII (direct election of Senators), XIX (prohibits sex discrimination), XXIII (grants DC residents the right to vote in presidential elections), XXIV (prohibits poll taxes in federal elections), and XXVI (prohibits age-based discrimination).

Conclusion

For these reasons, the Office of the Inspector General should conduct a full investigation into the actions of Attorney General Bondi and other DOJ officials involved in the demand for Minnesota's voter registration data, including whether there was an abuse of authority or violation of law.

/s/

Ambassador Norman Eisen (ret.)
Executive Chair and Founder
Democracy Defenders Fund

/s/

Virginia Canter
Ethics and Anticorruption Chief Counsel and Director
Democracy Defenders Fund

/s/

Diamond Brown
Senior Policy Counsel
Democracy Defenders Fund