

---

## Homeland Security Staffers Were Warned Not To Leak Information Or Face Legal Consequences

A senior agency official warned in a department-wide email that employees could potentially face criminal, civil, or administrative consequences for leaking information.

**By Hamed Aleaziz**

Posted on April 4, 2019, at 7:49 p.m. ET



Kirstjen Nielsen, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, speaks to reporters in San Ysidro, California.

*Sandy Huffaker / AFP / Getty Images*



**The Rebel Wilson And Geoffrey Rush Defamation Cases Could Meet In An Appeal Court**

**The ACLU Has Fined The Fatal Border**

---

Department of Homeland Security employees were warned Thursday not to disclose “nonpublic information” or potentially face criminal, civil, or administrative consequences, a senior agency official said in a department-wide email to staff and obtained by BuzzFeed News.

“As federal employees, we serve the public, and our loyalties must prioritize that purpose above all others. A violation of the public trust might arise, for example, if DHS personnel disclose nonpublic information or use it for their own personal benefit, such as for monetary gain, or for the private gain of others,” wrote Chip Fulghum, deputy under secretary for management.

“[S]uch unauthorized use or disclosure would be considered a misuse of position and, depending on the nature of the information disclosed, could expose the DHS employee to personal criminal, civil, or administrative consequences,” he warned.

Fulghum told staff “nonpublic information” included details “you know or should have known has not been made available to the general public, is designated as confidential and would not be made public even upon a request,” including material that may be withheld in a Freedom of Information Act request and data that DHS may make public at a later time.

The memo warning against leaking information suggested there may have been a significant unauthorized disclosure, a former DHS official said

“There have been so many leaks throughout the administration. This sounds like there is some leak that is different in kind and that they are trying to make sure it is the last of its kind,” Scott Shuchart, a former DHS senior adviser, told BuzzFeed News.

The memo to staff Thursday concluded by stating “unauthorized use or disclosure” of information does not include protected whistleblower disclosures, which are those communicating evidence of legal violations, gross mismanagement, waste of funds, and other issues. These disclosures can be made through “various channels” but disclosures of classified information or items protected by the Privacy Act must be made to Congress, the Office of Special Counsel, or to an Inspector General Office.

Ur Jaddou, a former chief counsel for United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, said the letter appeared to be intimidating in nature.

“It starts with slapping people down, scaring them and then turning around — ‘I know you have whistleblower protections,’ but the average person is not a lawyer and even if they are a lawyer, if they are not in this area of whistleblower protections it is a little unnerving,” she said. “It would make you think twice about doing your duty.”

USCIS personnel have received emails in the past warning them not to leak information to the media, which was first reported by BuzzFeed News.

Elsewhere on Wednesday, Fulghum sent a letter requesting DHS employees enlist in up to 45-day work shifts to help Customs and Border Protection officials transport “15–50” people per trip to Border Patrol stations or immigration facilities from remote sites, assist with initial medical assessments of juveniles and adults in custody,

transport people to hospitals, distribute meals, and keep track of

Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials are in need of physicians and nurses to evaluate and treat those in their custody, Fulghum said, and attorneys to help with immigration litigation. Previous immigration experience, he said, was not necessary as the office would provide the training.

#### TOPICS IN THIS ARTICLE

Immigration



Hamed Aleaziz is a reporter for BuzzFeed News and is based in San Francisco.

Contact [Hamed Aleaziz](#) at [hamed.aleaziz@buzzfeed.com](mailto:hamed.aleaziz@buzzfeed.com).

Got a confidential tip? [Submit it here](#).