

Chairman Peters Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: Federal Records
March 20, 2024

The Committee will come to order.

The federal government handles a massive number of records and documents. These records build an essential account of the work that the government does for the American people, and they help our constituents get access to the benefits and resources they need. These records also serve as an aid to Congressional oversight. They help us hold the executive branch accountable, ensure appropriate use of taxpayer dollars, and keep the federal government working well for the American people.

That's why keeping accurate records is so important – and why it's such a big problem when federal agencies fail to do so.

Government officials from Administrations of both parties have mishandled federal records. In some cases, existing records retention rules were blatantly disregarded. In other cases, federal officials failed to create records of key meetings – used their personal devices for official business – and deleted messages that should have been saved. In the past few years, we've even heard troubling reports of officials destroying documents on purpose.

Other systemic challenges have to do with the increase in electronic records and the use of new technology. Our procedures need to be updated to account for social media, video conferencing tools, collaborative office systems, messaging apps that automatically delete key content, and the other modern tools that our government uses every day.

Today's hearing will help us examine and improve our system for keeping federal records. Our witnesses are experts in the fields of records management and government transparency. They will help us evaluate federal agencies' compliance with recordkeeping laws, as well as the reforms we need to implement.

Whether it's adapting to new technologies, making it easier to enforce the guidelines we have in place, or committing more resources to records management, we can take steps to make this process work better. That's why I'm working on legislation that would update the Federal Records Act – making our government more transparent, efficient, and accountable.