

What to know about the Epstein files

BY MICHAEL R. SISAK
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — The clock is ticking for the U.S. government to open up its files on Jeffrey Epstein.

After months of rancor and recriminations, Congress has passed and President Donald Trump has signed legislation compelling the Justice Department to give the public everything it has on Epstein — and it has to be done before Christmas.

On Tuesday, a federal judge said the department could release grand jury transcripts and other documents from the sex trafficking case brought against Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein’s former girlfriend. Judge Paul A. Engelmayer had previously rejected the Justice Department’s unsealing requests before the transparency law was passed. In Tuesday’s ruling, he cautioned that people shouldn’t expect to learn much new information from the records, saying they “do not reveal any heretofore unknown means or methods of Epstein’s or Maxwell’s crimes.”

Last week, a different federal judge gave the department permission to release transcripts of a grand jury investigation into Epstein’s abuse of underage girls in Florida.

While there’s sure to be never-before-seen material in the thousands of pages likely to be released in the Florida transcripts and other Epstein-related records, a lot has already been

made public, including by Congress and through litigation.

And don’t expect a “client list” of famous men who cavorted with Epstein. Though such a list has long been rumored, the Justice Department said in July that it doesn’t exist.

Here’s a look at what’s expected to be made public, what isn’t, and a refresher on how we got to this point:

WHO IS JEFFREY EPSTEIN?

Epstein was a millionaire money manager known for socializing with celebrities, politicians, billionaires and the academic elite who was accused of sexually abusing underage girls.

His relationships with powerful men, including Trump, former President Bill Clinton and the former British prince Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, have been the subject of endless fascination and speculation. Neither Trump nor Clinton has been accused of wrongdoing. Andrew has denied abusing anyone.

Police in Palm Beach, Florida, began investigating Epstein in 2005 after he was accused of paying a 14-year-old girl for sex. The FBI then joined the investigation, but Epstein made a secret deal with the U.S. attorney in Florida to avoid federal charges, enabling him to plead guilty in 2008 to a relatively minor state-level prostitution charge. He served 13 months in a



Jose Luis Magana | Associated Press

A World Without Exploitation projection is seen on the wall of the National Gallery of Art calling on Congress to vote yes on the Epstein Files Transparency Act in Washington on Nov. 17.

jail work-release program.

In 2019, during Trump’s first term, Manhattan federal prosecutors revived the case and charged Epstein with sex trafficking, alleging he sexually abused dozens of girls. He killed himself in jail a month after his arrest.

In 2021, a federal jury in Manhattan convicted Epstein’s longtime confidante and former girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell of sex trafficking for helping recruit some of his underage victims. She is serving a 20-year prison sentence.

What’s in the Justice Department’s Epstein files?

Records related to the aborted Florida investigation, the Manhattan investigations, and anything else the Justice Department did to examine Epstein’s dealings in

the time in between.

They could include notes and reports written by FBI agents; transcripts of witness interviews, photographs, videos and other evidence; Epstein’s autopsy report; and some material that may already be public, such as flight logs and travel records.

The law, dubbed the Epstein Files Transparency Act, mandates the Justice Department to release all unclassified documents and investigative materials, including files relating to immunity deals and internal communications about whom to charge or investigate.

The transcripts that will be released after Friday’s ruling by a Florida federal judge could shed more light on federal prosecutors’ decision not to go forward with their case from two decades

ago. It’s not known when the transcripts will be made public.

WHAT ISN’T AUTHORIZED FOR RELEASE UNDER THE LAW?

Anything containing a victim’s personally identifiable information.

The law allows the Justice Department to withhold or redact records that, if made public, would constitute “a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” It also bars the release of any materials depicting the sexual abuse of children, or images of death, physical abuse, or injury.

That means that if videos or photos exist of Epstein or anyone else sexually abusing underage girls, they can’t be made public.

However, the law also makes clear that

no records shall be withheld or redacted — meaning certain parts are blacked out — solely because their release would cause embarrassment or reputational harm to any public figure, government official or foreign dignitary.

WHEN WILL THE FILES BE AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC?

The legislation requires the Justice Department to make the documents public in a searchable and downloadable format within 30 days of Trump signing it into law. That means no later than Dec. 19.

However, the law also allows the Justice Department to withhold files that it says could jeopardize an active federal investigation. That’s also longstanding Justice Department policy. Files can also be withheld if they’re found to be classified or if they pertain to national defense or foreign policy.

While investigations into Epstein and Maxwell are long over, Attorney General Pam Bondi last week ordered a top federal prosecutor to lead an investigation into people who knew Epstein and some of Trump’s political foes, including Clinton.

That investigation, taken up at Trump’s urging despite the Justice Department previously finding no evidence to support such a probe, could give the government grounds to temporarily withhold at least some of the material.

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