

Justice Department Told Trump in May That His Name Is Among Many in the Epstein Files; Bondi also told president at the meeting that Justice decided to not release more Jeffrey Epstein documents because of the presence of child pornography and the need to protect victims

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FULL TEXT

When Justice Department officials reviewed what Attorney General Pam Bondi called a "truckload" of documents related to Jeffrey Epstein earlier this year, they discovered that Donald Trump's name appeared multiple times, according to senior administration officials.

In May, Bondi and her deputy informed the president at a meeting in the White House that his name was in the Epstein files, the officials said. Many other high-profile figures were also named, Trump was told. Being mentioned in the records isn't a sign of wrongdoing.

The officials said it was a routine briefing that covered a number of topics and that Trump's appearance in the documents wasn't the focus.

They told the president at the meeting that the files contained what officials felt was unverified hearsay about many people, including Trump, who had socialized with Epstein in the past, some of the officials said. One of the officials familiar with the documents said they contain hundreds of other names.

They also told Trump that senior Justice Department officials didn't plan to release any more documents related to the investigation of the convicted sex offender because the material contained child pornography and victims' personal information, the officials said. Trump said at the meeting he would defer to the Justice Department's decision to not release any further files.

The meeting set the stage for the high-profile review to come to an end. Bondi had said in February that Epstein's client list was "sitting on my desk right now to review." Trump said last week in response to a journalist's question that Bondi hadn't told him that his name was in the files.

The administration didn't publicly announce the decision until weeks later on July 7, when the Justice Department posted a memo on its website . The statement, which was unsigned, stated that a thorough review had turned up no list of Epstein's clients , no evidence that would lead to an investigation of uncharged third parties and no additional documents that merited public disclosure. It said that much of the material would have been sealed in a trial to protect victims and to block the dissemination of child pornography.

Typically, the FBI doesn't disclose materials that aren't related to a charged offense.

"This is another fake news story, just like the previous story by The Wall Street Journal," said White House communications director Steven Cheung.

In a statement to the Journal on Friday, Bondi and the deputy attorney general, Todd Blanche, said nothing in the files warranted further investigation or prosecution. "As part of our routine briefing, we made the President aware of

the findings," they said.

On Tuesday, Blanche said on X that the Justice Department was seeking to arrange a meeting with Ghislaine Maxwell in the coming days to discuss any possible information about anyone who has committed crimes with Epstein. Maxwell was found guilty in 2021 of helping Epstein's sex trafficking and sentenced to 20 years in prison. She has been in custody since she was charged in 2020 and didn't testify at her trial.

One of Maxwell's lawyers, David Oscar Markus, confirmed the discussions and said, "We are grateful to President Trump for his commitment to uncovering the truth in this case." Maxwell has been seeking to have her conviction overturned, contending she didn't receive a fair trial.

Both Epstein and Trump said years ago that they had a falling out. On Wednesday, after the publication of this article, Trump's spokesman Cheung said: "The fact is that The President kicked him out of his club for being a creep."

Trump has said their friendship ended before the financier was indicted for soliciting prostitution in 2006. Epstein later pleaded guilty to procuring a minor for prostitution in 2008, served time in a Florida jail and registered as a sex offender. When Epstein was arrested again in 2019, Trump said he hadn't talked to Epstein for about 15 years. Epstein died in jail that year while awaiting trial on federal charges of sex trafficking.

FBI Director Kash Patel has privately told other government officials that Trump's name appeared in the files, according to people close to the administration.

Patel declined to answer an inquiry from the Journal about the Epstein case, but said in a statement that the memo on the Justice Department website explaining why the department wouldn't release more Epstein documents was "consistent with the thorough review conducted by the FBI and DOJ."

Details of Bondi's meeting with Trump haven't been previously reported. Trump's advisers had for months, including during the presidential campaign, said they would release the files, and Trump, while at times equivocal, indicated he would support the release.

Trump's supporters, including some now serving in senior roles in the administration, claimed that the documents would expose global elites and powerful Democrats who spent time with the disgraced financier.

The decision to not release the files has triggered the most serious backlash from Trump's political base since he launched his bid for the White House a decade ago, with a vocal group of the president's allies seeing the move as a massive betrayal.

Trump has told administration officials in recent weeks that he wanted the growing public attention on Epstein to go away. On Tuesday, House Speaker Mike Johnson cut short the legislative session as some lawmakers demanded votes on more releases related to the Epstein files.

Grand jury testimony

Last Thursday, The Wall Street Journal published an article about a letter bearing Trump's name that was included in a 2003 birthday album for Epstein, which was assembled before the financier was first charged. On Friday, Trump sued the Journal's reporters, Journal publisher Dow Jones, parent company News Corp and executives, calling the letter "nonexistent" and alleging the article defamed him.

A spokeswoman for Dow Jones said, "We have full confidence in the rigor and accuracy of our reporting, and will vigorously defend against any lawsuit."

Pages from the leather-bound album are among the documents examined by Justice Department officials who investigated Epstein years ago, according to people who have reviewed the pages. It's unclear if any of the pages are part of the Trump administration's recent review.

On Thursday, Trump said he had directed Bondi to "produce any and all pertinent Grand Jury testimony, subject to Court approval!" On Friday, Bondi and Blanche asked a federal court to do so, saying it was "a matter of public interest."

The grand jury testimony makes up only a portion of the more than 300 gigabytes of Epstein-related material the FBI compiled as part of the recent review. Among other material, the FBI confiscated digital and documentary evidence from Epstein's properties in the U.S. Virgin Islands and New York in 2019 when he was arrested.

Grand jury testimony is subject to secrecy protections and faces potentially high hurdles for public release.

Administration officials privately acknowledge that the court is unlikely to release the testimony.

On July 15, an ABC News journalist asked Trump, as he took questions from reporters at the White House, what Bondi told him about the Epstein files: "Specifically, did she tell you at all that your name appeared in the files?"

"No, no, she's—she's given us just a very quick briefing," Trump responded. He also said Bondi had "really done a very good job" on the Epstein review.

Bondi-Bongino clash

The decision to not release the files and the harsh fallout among the public has roiled some of Trump's senior staff, who have staked their reputations on exposing the ties between Epstein and moneyed elites.

Patel, the FBI director, and his deputy, Dan Bongino, had been in favor of releasing more documents, people familiar with their efforts said.

Bongino has told colleagues that his association with the administration's decision to keep the files private has eroded his credibility among the base of support that fueled his rise as a successful podcaster and media personality on the right, according to a senior administration official. Bongino didn't respond to requests for comment.

On July 9, after ABC News reached out to the White House about Bondi's briefing to the president, Bongino and Bondi clashed in a meeting in which Bondi alleged that Bongino secretly provided information to the media to damage her reputation, people familiar with the meeting said.

Bongino in turn exploded about Bondi, his face red, and called her a liar, a senior administration official said.

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