

From: [Byard Duncan](#)
To: [AGO - Info](#)
Subject: A public records request from ProPublica
Date: Thursday, April 14, 2022 6:19:21 PM
Attachments: [Vermont Homevestors PRR.pdf](#)

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Greetings. Hope you're well.

My name is Byard Duncan. I'm a reporter with ProPublica, an award-winning nonprofit investigative newsroom. [More about us here.](#)

Please find my records request attached.

I look forward to your response, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

Byard Duncan
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April 13, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Byard Duncan. I'm a reporter with ProPublica. This is a request under the Vermont Public Records Act. I'm writing today to request all consumer complaints your office has received since Jan. 1, 2012 that concern or reference the real estate franchise company "HomeVestors of America," a.k.a. "Homevestors of America, Inc." a.k.a. "Homevestors." I'm also requesting any complaints your office has received that concern or reference franchisees of Homevestors and its aforementioned aliases. Finally, I am requesting any complaints your office has received that include the phrases "ugly houses" or "we buy ugly houses" or "we buy homes."

I am further requesting any documents your office possesses – including but not limited to memos, reports, investigations, internal communications, and lawsuits – that concern or reference HomeVestors and/or its franchisees.

I would like to receive the information in the following format: electronic.

I am available to discuss the scope of the request and any questions by phone (401-429-3767) or email (byard.duncan@propublica.org).

As a representative of the news media, I am only required to pay for the direct cost of duplication after the first 100 pages. This information is being sought on behalf of ProPublica, an independent, non-profit news organization, for dissemination to the general public.

Please waive any applicable fees. Release of the information is in the public interest because it will contribute significantly to public understanding of government operations and activities. As a non-profit journalistic entity, ProPublica does not have the same commercial interests of other news organizations.

If my request is denied in whole or part, I ask that you justify all deletions by reference to specific exemptions of the Act. I will also expect you to release all segregable portions of otherwise exempt material. I, of course, reserve the right to appeal your decision to withhold any information or to deny a waiver of fees.

I also ask that this request be expedited. Expedited processing is allowed, in some states, for requests that show a "compelling need," and ProPublica is primarily engaged in disseminating information, with an urgency to inform the public concerning federal government activity.

The existence of predatory home-buying initiatives has been acknowledged publicly multiple times and has become a matter of pressing public interest. Examples below:\

<https://ncdoj.gov/attorney-general-josh-stein-reaches-120000-settlement-with-eastern-nc-real-estate-business/>

<https://www.vcstar.com/story/news/local/communities/camarillo/2020/08/27/we-buy-ugly-houses-franchisee-pleads-guilty-felony-counts/3445222001/>

<https://richmondbizsense.com/2020/10/19/real-estate-broker-faces-lawsuits-by-investors-and-state-investigations/>

<https://www.denverpost.com/2017/06/22/colorado-we-buy-ugly-houses-franchisee-guilty-federal-charges/>

ProPublica is a non-profit, investigative newsroom primarily engaged in disseminating information in the public interest. Since we began publishing in 2008, ProPublica has received six Pulitzer Prizes, eight George Polk Awards, and four Peabody Awards, among other recognitions of journalistic excellence. We publish content daily on our website, propublica.org. Our newsroom has been actively covering fair housing issues, and in requesting these records, would primarily engage in disseminating information (i.e., reviewing and reporting on these records and sharing our findings with the public) where there is “an urgency to inform the public concerning actual or alleged Federal Government activity,” as the compelling need provision requires.

I certify that my statements concerning the need for expedited processing are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

I look forward to your reply, as the state statute requires.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Byard Duncan
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