



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on August 7, 2026

New Mexico Sues DOJ Over Access to Epstein Records in Zorro Ranch Probe

Federal prosecutors in President Donald Trump's Department of Justice (DOJ) told New Mexico to stop investigating Jeffrey Epstein in 2019 and promised to share what they found. The state complied. According to a new lawsuit, the promised evidence never came.

Now New Mexico is asking a federal judge to force the DOJ to open the files.

New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez [sued](#) the DOJ and Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche on Wednesday in federal court in Washington, D.C. The state seeks access to unredacted investigative records tied to Epstein and his former Zorro Ranch outside Santa Fe.



U.S. Department of Justice/Wikimedia Commons
Jeffrey Epstein's Zorro Ranch

The lawsuit states those records could identify victims, witnesses, possible co-conspirators, and additional criminal conduct. New Mexico says federal resistance is obstructing an active state criminal investigation.

"We have heard repeatedly they will cooperate and what our team has experienced is anything but cooperation," Torrez [told](#) the press.

A Ranch the FBI Never Searched

Epstein bought Zorro Ranch in 1993 and used it for more than 25 years. The complaint says:

The Epstein Files include over 13,000 references to Zorro Ranch and 5,000 references to New Mexico as locations where victims were trafficked, groomed, and assaulted.

The state opened its own investigation in early 2019. Per the lawsuit:

Between February and July 2019, NMDOJ investigators and attorneys contacted and interviewed victims who reported being sexual abused in New Mexico by Epstein, his associates, and former contractors of Epstein and Zorro Ranch.

Then the federal government intervened.

According to federal records cited in the complaint, DOJ officials told New Mexico on July 23, 2019, "to stand down" from its sex-trafficking investigation. The state agreed. In return, federal authorities would refer state crimes back to New Mexico and pass along information about crimes committed within the state.



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New Mexico then gave federal prosecutors its entire investigative file, including police reports and recorded witness interviews. But the promised information from the federal government never materialized, the state says.

Federal investigators also never searched Zorro Ranch. One FBI email from August 2019 acknowledged “one victim who may have been raped at the NM residence,” yet concluded agents lacked probable cause to search it.

New Mexico [reopened](#) its investigation in February. State investigators [searched](#) the ranch on March 9, apparently marking the first law-enforcement search of the property. The current owners, the family of former Texas state Senator Don Huffines, who is now running for the state’s comptroller office, cooperated with the search. They bought the property from Epstein’s estate in 2023, and have since renamed it San Rafael Ranch.

Ten Requests, 31 Pages

Torrez first [asked](#) for relevant unredacted material in February. His office later submitted a formal request under DOJ’s [Touhy regulations](#), which govern requests for federal records and testimony in outside proceedings.

The request identified nine federal records by production number and sought related material involving Epstein, Ghislaine Maxwell, their associates, Zorro Ranch, and possible New Mexico crimes.

DOJ officials repeatedly promised cooperation. On June 12, Ryan Ellison, the top federal prosecutor in New Mexico, [said](#), “I anticipate full cooperation,” adding that “there will be full cooperation.”

What eventually arrived was underwhelming. Torrez’s office [describes](#):

July 10, 2026: [U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of New Mexico] hand-delivers its production: 31 pages consisting almost entirely of documents already released through the [Epstein Files Transparency Act] portal, redacted materials offering no new investigative content, and photocopies of local news coverage.”

Then the Southern District of New York (SDNY), where federal prosecutors brought the Epstein and Maxwell cases, shut the door more firmly. On July 14, the state’s Justice Department [lamented](#),

Today we sent another letter to @TheJusticeDept and this afternoon, SDNY called to inform us they will NOT cooperate and will not support the only active criminal investigation into Jeffrey Epstein.

As reasons, federal officials cited victim privacy requirements and protective orders governing Epstein and Maxwell records.

New Mexico asked whether DOJ would help seek changes to those orders if necessary. The prosecutor said such cooperation was “unlikely,” according to the complaint.

The Privacy Fight

DOJ denies that it is improperly blocking the investigation.

After New Mexico filed suit, the department said federal law and court orders restrict what it can



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disclose. [Per Axios](#), a DOJ spokesperson said:

The Epstein Files Transparency Act does not require, and the protective orders in place in the Southern District of New York do not permit, disclosure of victim-identifying information carte blanche, and New Mexico has provided no lawful basis to justify such sweeping disclosures.

According to the lawsuit, DOJ also invoked the Privacy Act, arguing that New Mexico's request would violate its disclosure restrictions.

New Mexico, however, argues that DOJ is misreading both the Privacy Act and the court orders.

Its complaint points to a Privacy Act exception that permits disclosure to another government agency for authorized law-enforcement activity. It also argues that the Epstein and Maxwell protective orders bar *public* disclosure of victim and witness identities, not confidential sharing with New Mexico law enforcement.

Torrez also highlights an awkward contrast. DOJ has allowed all 535 members of Congress to inspect unredacted Epstein materials in a secure reading room. Yet it refuses comparable access to state prosecutors conducting a criminal investigation.

The [state says](#) it has offered to review the files at the Justice Department under federal security rules.

What New Mexico Is Investigating

The state probe is wide-ranging.

New Mexico told DOJ that investigators are examining possible felony offenses "including but not limited to homicide, kidnapping, criminal sexual penetration, criminal sexual contact, and human trafficking."

The complaint says redacted records may identify people other than Epstein and Maxwell who participated in or witnessed crimes. One DOJ prosecution memorandum describes an alleged sexual assault at Zorro Ranch by a woman other than Maxwell. It also notes:

Another FBI interview summary (which does not redact the name of either Epstein or Maxwell) recounts: "The first assault happened in New Mexico; EPSTEIN and [REDACTED] were both there in the room."

The state says those missing names matter. Investigators need them to locate witnesses, corroborate accounts, reconstruct travel, and determine whether anyone still living could face charges. The DOJ, along with the FBI, [concluded last June](#) that Epstein had no "clients" or co-conspirators.

A parallel legislative inquiry adds weight to the dispute. New Mexico's Epstein Survivors' Truth Commission [reported](#) this week that evidence shows that at least five women and girls were abused at Zorro Ranch between 1996 and 2012. It identified "at least 30 other individuals who potentially were abused by Epstein in New Mexico."

The commission has received more than 100,000 records. Several subpoenas were refused or ignored, including one sent to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the SDNY.



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The Legal Fight

Despite its broader federalism argument, New Mexico's complaint rests on two claims under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA).

The first accuses DOJ of acting arbitrarily and unlawfully when it denied access. The second accuses the department of unlawfully withholding or unreasonably delaying action required by its own regulations.

The state asks the court to set aside DOJ's denial and require a lawful review. It also wants DOJ compelled to produce records to the extent federal law requires.

The case is narrower than the public fight over releasing every Epstein file. New Mexico demands confidential law-enforcement access to records that may help it investigate crimes allegedly committed inside its borders.

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