

19 June 2026

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Personal details removed for proactive release

OIA 30959

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Thank you for your email of 11 May 2026, transferred from the Minister of Foreign Affairs on 21 May 2026, in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

"regarding the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (MFAT) involvement in the return of New Zealander Everlee Wihongi.

Given the public interest and the importance of transparency in such matters, I kindly ask for a detailed account of MFAT's actions and decisions related to either her return or confirmation of her whereabouts and safety."

Response to your request

Consular officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Ministry) have provided extensive assistance in Ms Wihongi's case. Privacy constraints mean we are unable to disclose the details of this assistance. However, the Ministry can confirm:

- Consular officials have been, and remain, in regular contact with Ms Wihongi and her designated family representative, including to confirm her wellbeing.
- Legal representation for Ms Wihongi was confirmed at an early stage of her case, and consular officials continue to be in regular contact with that representative.
- Prior to Ms Wihongi being moved to a different facility in another US State, the New Zealand Consulate in Los Angeles visited her in detention on 30 April. The Consulate remains in contact with her.
- The New Zealand Embassy in Washington and Consulate in Los Angeles has been in contact with various US authorities on Ms Wihongi's case, including to confirm her location.
- The Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs has been kept informed of developments on Ms Wihongi's case.

In its public comments on the situation, the Ministry has been clear that we are unable to influence immigration or judicial decisions of other countries. This limitation and other advice on the assistance we can provide New Zealanders who have been arrested or jailed is available on the SafeTravel website: <https://www.safetravel.govt.nz/while-you-re-away/when-things-go-wrong/you-have-been-arrested-or-jailed>

All other information related to this case is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the OIA, to protect personal privacy. Where the information has been withheld under section 9 of the OIA, no public interest in releasing the information has been identified that would override the reasons for withholding it.

Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. Therefore, our response to your request (with your personal information removed) may be published on the Ministry website: www.mfat.govt.nz/en/about-us/contact-us/official-information-act-responses/

If you have any questions about this decision, you can contact us by email at: DM-ESD@mfat.govt.nz. You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision by contacting www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SC', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Corbett
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade