

ONE-PAGE BRIEF · LEVINSON ACT, 22 U.S.C. § 1741

Travis Leake and the Levinson Act

Michael “Travis” Leake, an American citizen and U.S. Air Force veteran from Bakersfield, California, has been held in Russia since the night of June 6, 2023. He is serving 13 years at IK-6, a penal colony in Vladimir Oblast. His advocates have asked the State Department to designate him **WRONGFULLY DETAINED**. It has not, and no official has told his family why.

We ask the Secretary of State to review the record and determine, on the totality of the circumstances, that he is WRONGFULLY DETAINED under 22 U.S.C. § 1741. Every court-record fact on this page carries its page number. We ask the Department to check them.

The sale charges trace to one witness, a woman police stopped with drug bundles on June 5, 2023, and to a statement Travis gave two days later without a lawyer, which he later retracted. His name first enters the file in a report written that day by the operative who took her statement. At trial she said operatives told her to report more than she had, and that he could not have had that quantity of drugs at home. No drug found in his home was charged as intended for sale.

The file records his detention at 19:00 on June 6. The formal detention record is dated 14:20 on June 8. Police took his first statement in between. No fingerprint or DNA examination appears anywhere in the 690-page file. The search protocol lists his black iPhone; it is absent from every evidence record that follows. His torture complaint was sent to the accused officers’ own department. The judge who ruled the search of his apartment lawful on June 9, 2023 was the judge who tried him.

What the record shows, by factor

§ 1741(a)(10)	A statement taken without counsel in custody nobody recorded; witnesses shown drugs rather than watching them found; a phone that vanished; the judge who approved the search tried the case.
§ 1741(a)(1)	From the prosecution’s own file: an accuser who walked her story back on the stand, an untested bundle that matches her batch, and a retracted statement taken without counsel.
§ 1741(a)(8)	The Department’s Russia report: judges “typically agreed with the investigator” and “usually did not suppress confessions taken without a lawyer present.”
§ 1741(a)(11)	Whelan, Griner, Gershkovich, Fogel, Karelina and Gilman came home through negotiation, not Russian courts.
§ 1741(a)(2)	As counsel recounted her testimony, officers were “slightly euphoric” at arresting an American. State television framed him as an American military figure from the day of his arrest.
§ 1741(a)(3)	In June 2026 a Russian federal television host proposed planting drugs on visiting Americans to refill the “exchange fund.”
§ 1741(a)(7)	The U.S. Embassy holds counsel’s closing argument, the photograph of his injuries his lawyer handed it, and its own readout of the April 2025 appeal hearing.
§ 1741(a)(9)	Attacked on camera in January 2024 and sent to solitary himself; a tooth lost for want of a dentist; more than three years in custody.
§ 1741(a)(5)	Russian law requires two civilian witnesses present at a search and a detention record within three hours. The witnesses were fetched after he was in custody; the record came 43 hours later.
§ 1741(a)(6)	Rolling Stone’s April 2025 investigation reported the questions about the charges.

Case facts

NAME	Michael “Travis” Leake
SERVICE	U.S. Air Force, 1989-90, 832d Civil Engineering Squadron, Arizona
DETAINED	June 6, 2023, Moscow
COURT	Khamovnichesky District Court, Moscow · case 12301450020000355
COUNTS	Five, under Articles 30, 228 and 228.1. Pleaded not guilty.
SENTENCE	13 years, strict-regime colony, July 18, 2024
APPEALS	Upheld April 10, 2025; cassation denied October 2025
HELD AT	IK-6, Melekhovo, Vladimir Oblast
DESIGNATION	Not designated. Requests filed June 2024, February 2025, September 2026.

What his advocates ask

- 1 A fresh review of the merits and a determination that he is **WRONGFULLY DETAINED** under § 1741.
- 2 Transfer of his case to the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, and attention to his dental and health needs now, which requires no designation.
- 3 Say his name whenever the Department speaks publicly about Americans it is working to bring home from Russia.
- 4 Identify any derogatory information the Department believes weighs against designation, so that it can be answered.
- 5 A written response with the Department’s actual reasons.

Every court-record fact here carries its page number at freetravisleake.com/the-case/. Court file (Exh. 3) cited by volume and sheet; defense closing argument (Exh. 2) is the certified translation of July 9, 2024. Human-rights report quotations: U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Russia.