

## **Documents Obtained by National ACLU Expose FBI and Police Spying on Individuals and Political Groups; Rhode Island Affiliate Files Request to Uncover More Spy Files**

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The American Civil Liberties Union charged today that the FBI and local police are engaging in intimidation based on political association and are improperly investigating law-abiding human rights and advocacy groups, according to documents obtained through a series of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. In response, the Rhode Island ACLU today filed a FOIA request seeking similar documents.

“The little information that has been disclosed so far, both nationally and locally, about joint ventures by the FBI and police raises serious concerns,” said ACLU of Rhode Island Executive Director Steven Brown. “It appears that people are being targeted based on their political activities and their ethnicity rather than for legitimate law enforcement purposes.”

In response to widespread complaints from students and political activists who said they were questioned by FBI agents in the months leading up to last summer’s political conventions, the ACLU filed FOIA requests in December 2004 on behalf of more than 100 groups and individuals. To date, the ACLU has received fewer than 20 pages in response to the FOIAs.

The ACLU said that the few documents received through the December FOIA requests shed light on the FBI’s misuse of Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF) to engage in political surveillance. In Colorado, one memo indicates an ongoing federal interest in Food Not Bombs, a group that provides free vegetarian food to the poor and protests war and poverty.

In Rhode Island, one of the very few publicized references to JTTF activities here involved the arrest of a Pawtucket resident for failing to appear in court on a minor larceny charge. The ACLU of Rhode Island called the involvement of the JTTF in this case puzzling, and said that the Middle Eastern name of the person arrested suggests the use of racial profiling in the JTTF’s activities. The ACLU of Rhode Island’s FOIA request, filed by volunteer attorney Jerry Elmer, seeks information about this particular arrest as well as information about how the practices and funding structure of the task forces may be encouraging rampant and unwarranted spying. Nine other state ACLU affiliates filed similar FOIA requests today.

The controversial FBI-led task forces came under scrutiny last month after Portland, Oregon became the first city in the nation to withdraw local law enforcement participation from the JTTFs rather than allow them to participate without proper oversight. The JTTF partnerships between the FBI and local police, in which local officers are “deputized” as federal agents, are intended to identify and monitor individuals and groups implicated in terrorism. But the ACLU charges that these task forces are allowing local police officers to target peaceful political and religious groups with no connection to terrorism.

The national ACLU charged that the FBI is wrongfully withholding thousands of pages of documents, and today filed a lawsuit in federal court to compel the FBI to comply with the FOIA requests. The complaint seeks files kept by the FBI on the ACLU, as well as Greenpeace, United for

Peace and Justice, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

“The FBI is taking tax dollars and resources established to fight terrorism and instead spying on innocent Americans who have done nothing more than speak out or practice their faith,” said national ACLU Associate Legal Director Ann Beeson. “By recruiting the local police into these activities, they are also sowing dissent and suspicion in communities around the country.”

The documents obtained by the ACLU are not the only evidence that the FBI is building files on activists, Beeson said. A classified FBI intelligence memorandum disclosed publicly in November 2003 revealed that the FBI has actually directed police to target and monitor lawful political demonstrations under the rubric of fighting terrorism.

For details and legal papers regarding the FOIA requests filed today by ACLU affiliates around the country, including a list of clients, go to [www.aclu.org/spyfiles](http://www.aclu.org/spyfiles).