

April 4, 2005

Dear Members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees:

While we applaud Congress' promise to hold oversight hearings concerning the USA Patriot Act, we are concerned that Congress will focus too narrowly on that Act and ignore the broader civil rights and civil liberties issues that are of concern to our organizations and all Americans. Congress must recognize that widespread opposition to the USA Patriot Act reflects a more general discomfort over the government's actions. It should note that the "anti-Patriot Act" resolutions passed by more than 360 communities and four states in fact deal with a wide array of issues outside the scope of the USA Patriot Act.

We urge the Congress to examine the many civil liberties issues that have arisen since 9/11, including the following:

- Mass secret arrests of Arabs and Muslims followed by detention for extended periods without charges, denials of access to counsel, secret hearings and, in some cases, abuse by prison guards;
- Abuse of the material witness authority to detain citizens and others without charges;
- Discriminatory enforcement of the immigration laws, leading to arbitrary detentions and deportations;
- Detentions of Americans incommunicado as "enemy combatants" without access to lawyers or the courts;
- Expanded use of secret wiretaps and secret searches of Americans' homes and offices;
- Massive growth in surveillance technologies and authority (including the authority under the USA Patriot Act to seize library and medical records and all commercial databases) with inadequate legal protections against abuse;
- Spying on lawful political and religious activity; and
- Eavesdropping on attorney-client communications without judicial approval or oversight.

Taken together, these issues reflect a steady assault on fundamental liberties that has served only to make us less free, and not more secure. With few exceptions, Congress has failed to address these issues. To the contrary, it is continuing to consider legislation, such as the Real ID Act, that targets immigrants and asylum seekers unfairly without enhancing security. For Congress now to focus only on the concerns raised by the USA Patriot Act would be inappropriate.

American Civil Liberties Union

American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado
American Immigration Lawyers Association
American Muslim Voice
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
Asian Law Caucus
Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California
Bill of Rights Defense Committee
Bill of Rights Supporters of Fort Collins (Colorado)
Center for Democracy and Technology
Center for National Security Studies
Concord Civil Liberties Committee (Concord, Massachusetts)
East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation, Oakland, CA
First Amendment Foundation
Japanese American Citizens League
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development
National Committee Against Repressive Legislation
National Council of La Raza
National Federation of Filipino American Associations
National Immigrant Solidarity Network
National Immigration Law Center
National Legal Sanctuary for Community Advancement
National Organization for Women
New Hampshire Faithful Democracy
New Hampshire Unitarian Universalist Social Responsibility Department
Open Society Policy Center
Organization of Chinese Americans
People For the American Way
Potters for Peace
South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow
Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition
The Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services
The Interfaith Alliance
The New York Immigration Coalition
Worldview, Ltd.
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
The Multiracial Activist