

FBI is backing away from libraries

AP — The FBI is backing away from its controversial program in which librarians were asked about the reading preferences of potential security risks.

FBI director William Sessions recently wrote Rep. Don Edwards, D-Calif., chairman of a judiciary subcommittee with FBI oversight, that the bureau has implemented new guidelines designed to make its "Library Awareness Program" less offensive to librarians and civil libertarians.

Librarians nationwide have protested the program as an infringement on privacy rights.

Earlier this year, the FBI asked the University of Utah's Marriott Library about a possible request by a Soviet diplomat for information from a restricted government data bank. Librarians refused to comply,

saying such information is confidential.

However, the FBI said that particular request was not part of its formal library program, but just an effort to keep track of a potential spy.

BUT THE incident was one of many noted at 14 institutions by the National Security Archive, a non-profit research institute, when it sued the FBI earlier this year for more information about the program.

The new guidelines may not end controversy about the program — because the FBI will still seek information about some people, but not as many as before.

In the new guidelines, the FBI agrees that outside of the New York City area, it will only ask librarians

to voluntarily give information about individuals already identified by the bureau as "known or suspected hostile intelligence agents and co-optees."

But in New York City, home of the United Nations, the FBI still will select libraries to voluntarily advise of activities of people who identify themselves as Soviet or Soviet-bloc nationals.

They will be asked to report about their activities if they seek assistance in conducting library research, request referrals to students or faculty who might be willing to assist in research, remove library materials without permission or seek biographical or personal information about librarians, students or faculty.

In the past, librarians were asked to report reading habits and activities of foreigners and other broad

categories of "suspicious people."

ALTHOUGH THE FBI said the program was voluntary, some librarians reported intimidation by agents seeking help in closed-door meetings, questioning their patriotism and supposedly claiming authorization to circumvent state library

confidentiality laws. Edwards said he feels the new guidelines still may not be good enough.

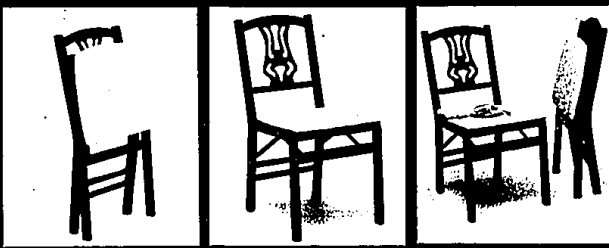
"Will talented men and women, whose research we need badly, some with perhaps a foreign accent or appearance, use our libraries with the same enthusiasm know that the FBI

has access to library records, even if limited?" he said.

Edwards has given copies of the new guidelines to librarians for their comments. "The subcommittee will continue its oversight, which could include additional public hearings. We view this FBI activity, however limited, with real concern."

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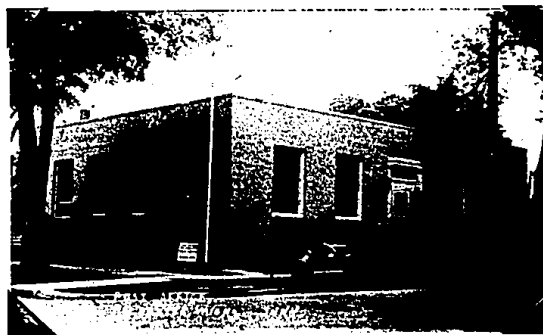
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