

ACLU of Ohio: <http://www.acluohio.org>

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ACLU wants more info on alleged spying

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By M.R. KROPKO ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

CLEVELAND - The American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio requested information Tuesday from the government about whether it spied on two anti-war groups and an attorney for a man suspected of terrorism connections.

ACLU officials said at a news conference that members of the anti-war groups want to know whether two meetings were attended by government agents. One meeting was last year in Akron by the Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization, and the another was in 2004 in Cleveland by the Northeast Ohio Anti-War Coalition.

The ACLU filed Freedom of Information Act requests with the Department of Defense, Justice Department, the FBI and police seeking records that document any collection of information about the groups.

Gary Daniels, the ACLU's litigation coordinator, said the ACLU became involved because the groups were included on a Defense Department classified database of information about suspicious people and activity inside the United States as reported by NBC News.

The ACLU also requested information about several people, including Akron lawyer Farhad Sethna, based on his association with the American Friends Service Committee. Sethna said he hopes the request will shed light on whether the government spied on his conversations with a client, Ashraf Al-Jailani, who recently was sent back to his native Yemen after being jailed three years on suspicions that he associated with suspected terrorists.

Jeffrey Gamso, Ohio AFL-CIO legal director, said he wants to find out whether the Defense Department's Counterintelligence Field Activity database has records of other Ohio groups or individuals and if ACLU meeting rooms were bugged.

"Of course I suspect that they are going after Farhad (Sethna) in part because of his representation of Al-Jailani. That's not the basis in which we are pursuing these things today. We are just acting on what we have gleaned so far," Gamso said.

Two federal lawsuits filed Jan. 17 allege that President Bush's electronic eavesdropping program exceeds his constitutional powers.

The lawsuits — one filed in New York by the Center for Constitutional Rights and the other in Detroit by the American Civil Liberties Union and other groups — say the program bypasses safeguards in a 1978 law requiring court approval of electronic monitoring.