

# ACLU Sues Pentagon for Documents on Peace Groups

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PHILADELPHIA -- The American Civil Liberties Union today filed a federal lawsuit to force the Department of Defense to turn over records it wrongly kept on peace groups and law-abiding Americans throughout the country.

“The U.S. military should not be in the business of maintaining secret databases about lawful First Amendment activities,” said ACLU attorney Ben Wizner. “It is an abuse of power and an abuse of trust for the military to play any role in monitoring critics of administration policies.”

The lawsuit was filed today in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania by the national ACLU and its affiliates in Florida, Georgia, Rhode Island, Maine, Pennsylvania and Washington. The lawsuit charges that the Defense Department is refusing to comply with national Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests seeking records on the ACLU, the American Friends Service Committee, Greenpeace, Veterans for Peace and United for Peace and Justice, as well as 26 local groups and activists.

The ACLU filed the FOIA requests on February 1, 2006 after evidence surfaced that the Pentagon was secretly conducting surveillance of protest activities, antiwar organizations and individuals who attended peace rallies. According to news reports, the Pentagon gathered information on law-abiding Americans and shared the information with other government agencies through the Threat and Local Observation Notice (TALON) database. The TALON program was initiated by former Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz in 2003 to track groups and individuals with possible links to terrorism. Following public outcry over the domestic spying program, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England issued a memorandum directing intelligence personnel to receive “refresher training on the policies for collection, retention, dissemination and use of information related to U.S. persons.”

In today’s lawsuit, the ACLU argues that the organizations and individuals monitored by the Pentagon have a right to know what information the military has collected about them. The ACLU seeks to uncover whether the TALON records have been or plan to be shared with another agency, or otherwise disseminated.

“Spying on citizens for merely executing their constitutional rights of free speech and peaceful assembly is chilling and marks a troubling trend for the United States,” said Joyce Miller, Assistant General Secretary for Justice and Human Rights of the American

Friends Service Committee. “These actions violate the rule of law and strike a severe blow against our Constitution.”

Some of the groups represented in today’s lawsuit, like the Rhode Island Community Coalition for Peace and the Pittsburgh Organizing Group, learned that they were under surveillance after NBC made public portions of the TALON database it had obtained. A full list of groups in today’s lawsuit is online at [www.aclu.org/spyfiles](http://www.aclu.org/spyfiles). Also today, the ACLU of Pennsylvania filed additional FOIA requests on behalf of more than 30 peace groups in the state. The groups fear they may have been monitored because they have publicly opposed the war in Iraq.

Similarly, the ACLU of Montana last week filed a FOIA request on behalf of eight state grassroots organizations that have questioned federal policies. The Montana FOIA was filed simultaneously with the Defense Department, the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security.

Attorneys in today’s lawsuit are Wizner, Ann Beeson and Scott Michelman with the national ACLU, and Mary Catherine Roper and Witold Walczak with the ACLU of Pennsylvania.

For more information, go to [www.aclu.org/spyfiles](http://www.aclu.org/spyfiles)