



CAMPAIGN FOR READER PRIVACY

...is someone reading over your shoulder?



An Open Letter in Support of the National Security Letters (NSL) Reform Act

Dear Members of Congress:

In the past year, two major reports by the Inspector General of the Justice Department have shown that the FBI has violated the law thousands of times since Congress expanded its authority to issue National Security Letters in 2001.

The Founding Fathers, who knew unchecked authority breeds abuses, would not have been surprised. The FBI issues NSLs without a showing of probable cause and with no prior judicial review. It uses them to gain access to private information including telephone, Internet, and financial records – even the records of U.S. citizens not suspected of any wrongdoing. A gag provision, twice ruled unconstitutional by a Federal court but still in effect, prevents these citizens from learning their records have been searched.

As booksellers, librarians, publishers, and writers, we share the concerns of all Americans for safety and security. But we also know how government intrusion into citizens' private lives threatens personal freedom at the most fundamental level. That is why we have been working to restore key privacy protections stripped by the Patriot Act and subsequent legislation, especially protections for information that bears directly on the First Amendment rights of Americans such as bookstore, library, and Internet records.

Congress has before it a bill that will reestablish the kinds of checks the Founding Fathers demanded. The **National Security Letters Reform Act** restricts FBI searches to the records of those either suspected of or directly connected to terrorism or espionage. It limits the time the gag order is in effect to 30 days unless the FBI goes to court to request an extension. And it allows meaningful after-the-fact court review of these gag orders, a crucial safeguard for discouraging abuses.

The NSL Reform Act gives the FBI the tools it needs to conduct urgent investigations without sacrificing our most basic constitutional and democratic principles.

Please pass this important bill.

On behalf of the Campaign for Reader Privacy,

Pat Schroeder
President and CEO
Association of American Publishers

Avin Mark Domnitz
CEO
American Booksellers Association

Loriene Roy
President
American Library Association

Francine Prose
President
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The Campaign for Reader Privacy was launched in 2004 to restore safeguards for reader privacy that were eliminated by the Patriot Act. It is a joint initiative of the American Library Association, the American Booksellers Association, the Association of American Publishers and PEN American Center.