

More Than 30 Bipartisan Organizations Urge Congress Against Reauthorizing Spy Powers in Spending Bill

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More than 30 bipartisan organizations on Wednesday urged congressional leaders not to include a reauthorization of a controversial surveillance law in a must-pass spending bill.

The bipartisan coalition wrote to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), and House Democrat Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) over [reports](#) that reauthorization of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) could be included in one of the funding bills that Congress will consider in the coming weeks.

The 30-plus civil organizations said in no uncertain terms that they oppose any effort to reauthorize the law in a must-pass spending bill. They [noted](#) that Americans on both sides of the aisle have been wrongfully surveilled:

Section 702 has been routinely abused in ways that violate Americans' fundamental civil liberties and civil rights. FBI agents have used this surveillance authority, which is supposed to be limited to non-U.S. citizens located outside the United States, to gain warrantless access to the communications of tens of thousands recent changes to its internal procedures, the abuses have continued, with agents conducting [judge](#) who contacted the FBI to report civil rights violations by a local police chief. NSA agents, for their part, have abused the authority to search for the communications of [online dating prospects](#) and [potential tenants](#).

In its current form, this authority is dangerous to our liberties and our democracy, and it should not be renewed for any length of time without robust debate, an opportunity for amendment, and — ultimately — far-reaching reforms. Bypassing this process by slipping an extension of the law into a must-pass funding bill would demonstrate a blatant disregard for the civil liberties and civil rights of the American people.

The organizations include those on the right, such as Americans for Prosperity (AFP) and FreedomWorks, and those on the left, such as Demand Progress and Free Press Action.

FreedomWorks and Demand Progress have [aggregated](#) just a few of the ways that intelligence agencies have abused Americans' privacy:

1. “[T]ens of thousands” of baseless searches “[related to civil unrest](#)” in a one-year period.
 1. including [141 racial justice protestors](#) and [thousands of January 6](#) suspects.
2. Searches for individuals an NSA analyst had met on an online dating site and a prospective tenant.
3. Searches for a [state court judge](#) who reported civil rights violations to the FBI.
4. Searches for places of worship that were intentionally hidden from oversight.
5. Searches for a [member of HPSCI](#) and a [U.S. senator](#).
6. A “batch” search for [19,000 Congressional donors](#).
7. “Batch” searches that [included](#) current and former federal government officials, journalists, and political commentators.
8. Searches for people who [came to the FBI to perform repairs](#).
9. Searches for [victims](#) who came to the FBI to report crimes.
10. Searches for [business, religious, and community leaders](#) who applied to participate in the FBI’s “Citizens Academy.”
11. Searches for college students participating in a “Collegiate Academy.”
12. Searches for family members and colleagues.
13. Searches for police officer candidates.
14. Searches for an individual [employed by a defense attorney](#).
15. Searches for a wrongly accused [American academic](#).
16. Searches based on a witness’s report that two men “of [Middle Eastern](#) descent” were loading cleaning supplies into a truck.
17. Searches for a [local political party](#).
18. “Batch” searches for [1600 Americans](#) “who had flown through an airport during a particular date range and were either traveling to or returning from a foreign country”
19. [2,000 searches](#) for “the names and dates of birth of individuals who were registered competitors in an athletic event.”

The coalition noted that there is little reason to reauthorize Section 702 in a must-pass spending bill, given that Congress has until April 19 for the law’s deadline.

Video Source: C-SPAN

A poll commissioned by FreedomWorks and Demand Progress [found](#) that 76 percent of Americans believe that government agencies, such as the FBI, should obtain a warrant before searching Americans’ communications.

Video Source: House Rules Committee

“Against this backdrop, it is clear that the only reason for including Section 702 in the continuing resolution would be to deny members a vote on critically-needed reforms,” the coalition urged in its letter to congressional leaders. “We urge you not to betray the trust of the American people by following such a course of action.”

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