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**NEW STUDY FROM POLITICAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATES FINDS DOMESTIC SURVEILLANCE
PILOT PROGRAM PROMOTES DISCRIMINATION, UNDERMINES SECURITY**

PRA CALLS FOR CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS BEFORE PROGRAM GOES NATIONWIDE

“Suspicious Activity Reporting” program pilot is unconstitutional and counterproductive, finds study.

*Program invites racial and religious profiling, complicates intelligence analysis,
lacks oversight, and wastes taxpayers’ money*

BOSTON, MA –A new study released today by the Boston-based think tank Political Research Associates shows that the Suspicious Activity Reporting program, also known as the SAR Initiative, undermines the counterterrorism efforts it is meant to enhance. The study strongly recommends against the Department of Justice extending the program from a 12-city pilot project to nationwide implementation (an announcement expected as early as tomorrow) until a Congressional investigation can take place and ongoing Congressional oversight is established.

The study, *PLATFORM FOR PREDJUDICE*, results from a year-long review of SAR programs through numerous interviews and extensive analysis of federal and local policies. The study also includes an in-depth case study of the Los Angeles Police Department program that spearheaded the effort to standardize Suspicious Activity Reporting. For the first time, the study:

- Explains how the SAR Initiative funnels reports from street cops to intelligence Fusion Centers and the broader national intelligence bureaucracy;
- Details how the SAR Initiative weakens time-tested protections against government abuse;
- Demonstrates how the SAR Initiative distracts police from identifying and investigating criminal offenses;
- Critiques the drastic reorientation of local police departments toward “intelligence-led policing” that effectively deputizes cops as intelligence agents;
- Makes concrete recommendations for improving domestic security and protecting Constitutional rights within domestic surveillance programs;
- Shows how taxpayer money is being spent on an unproven program that actually undermines other taxpayer-funded counterterrorism programs; and
- Calls for a Congressional investigation of the SAR Initiative before the DOJ can extend it nationally.

The SAR Initiative calls on local police to report suspicious activities to Fusion Centers, secretive information-sharing bodies currently operating in 72 cities around the nation. The SAR Initiative instructs police to gather non-specific data on people deemed to be acting suspiciously—offenses as common as taking pictures “with no aesthetic value,” using binoculars, and videotaping at popular tourist landmarks—and to submit standardized reports containing this information.

While standardizing reports enables analysts to electronically sift through criminal incidents to find potential terror plots – a worthy goal in theory – in practice, the SAR Initiative unnecessarily lowers the threshold for what kinds of information police can collect and share. Thom Cincotta, Civil Liberties Project Director for PRA, and the report’s author says, “Sharing terrorism information across agencies is a critical need. But focusing on innocent acts strays from that mission. It is a recipe for discriminatory treatment.”

This move also violates federal law banning police from collecting information unless there is “reasonable suspicion” of criminal conduct, and strengthens a new “intelligence-led policing” paradigm that Cincotta calls “pre-emptive policing.” According to Cincotta, “Tracking our legal behaviors ‘just in case’ runs contrary to basic Constitutional freedoms that all Americans should hold dear.”

PRA executive director, Tarso Luís Ramos says, “When taking photographs of landmark structures is defined as suspicious activity, police must decide whom to report among the thousands of people snapping pictures of Mann’s Chinese Theater or the Brooklyn Bridge. Unsurprisingly, evidence indicates they are relying on the dominant racial and ethnic stereotypes about who might be a terrorist. This not only violates Constitutional protections, but erodes mutual trust and makes communities less safe.”

Ameena Mirza Qazi, a civil rights attorney for the Council of American Islamic Relations in Southern California, states, “I have received dozens of complaints from people who were contacted by police for innocent behavior like photographing a friend at the airport, using the bathroom on an airplane, or even praying in public.” Qazi adds, “Individuals suffer not only the indignity of being illegally detained and searched, but harm also lingers with the insecurity that police have stored personal information and shared it with intelligence agencies.”

The troublesome trends identified in this report “demonstrate the critical need for independent public oversight of police intelligence units and Fusion Centers, which have unprecedented access to private data bases” says Carol Rose, Executive Director of the ACLU of Massachusetts. “Oversight is an essential safeguard against abuse and error; it’s the only way for taxpayers to ensure that law enforcement is making us more secure, not less so.”

The SAR Initiative began in Los Angeles in March 2008 when the LAPD issued Special Order #11, which charged officers to compile “information of a criminal or *non-criminal* nature.” The Departments of Justice and Homeland Security recommended that other U.S. cities take up LAPD’s practice and led a pilot project in 12 cities for the past two years.

According to PRA Executive Director Ramos, “The American people have a right to know whether this program is lawful, effective at preventing terrorism, or cost-effective. Evidence suggests that it is none of the above, but no effective public oversight exists and so there has been no public accounting. We call on Congress to investigate *before* this misguided pilot project is implemented nationwide.”

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