

Access secured

Clinton signs an executive order removing sexual orientation from the grounds for denial of security clearances

by Bob Roehr

A recent executive order updating security clearance procedures—among its many provisions—removes sexual orientation as the sole grounds for denying those clearances. It formalizes a process which has become increasingly common over the years.

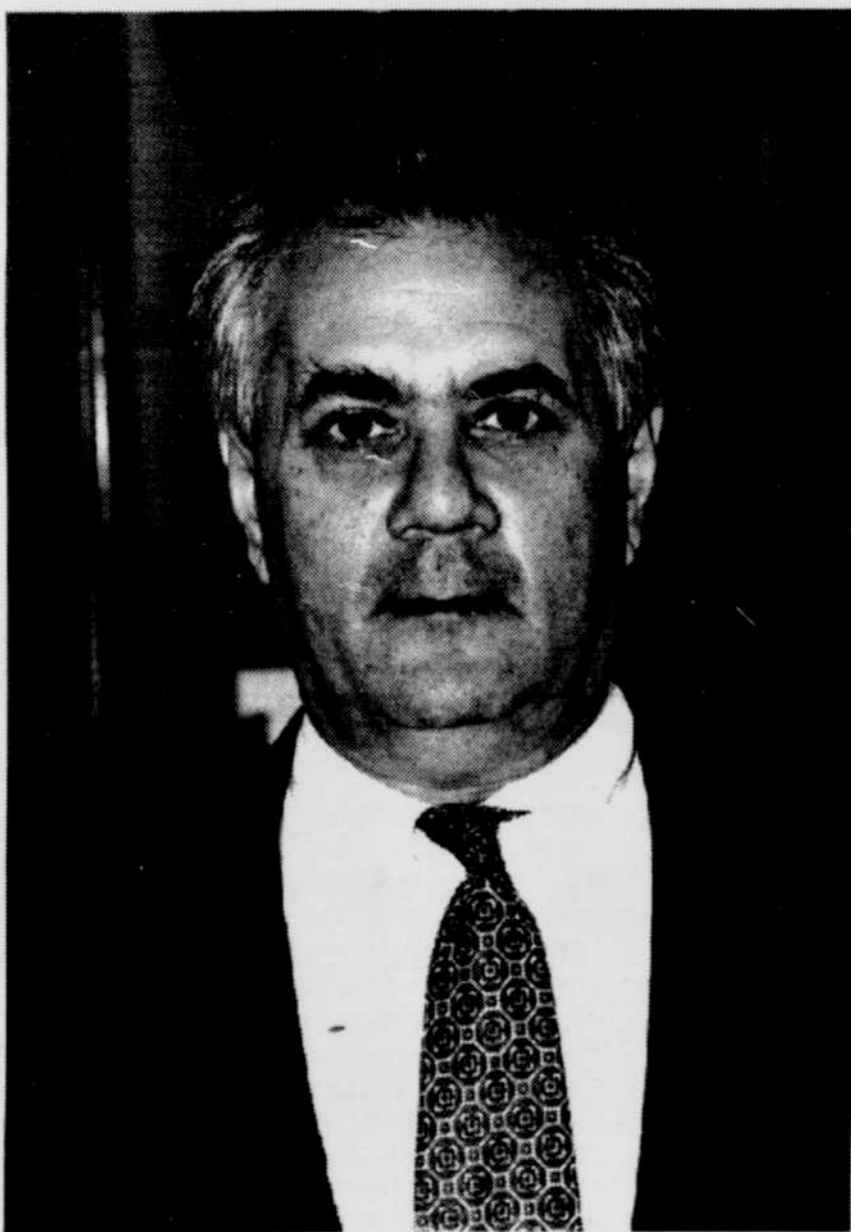
The 13-page "Access to Classified Information," signed Aug. 4 by President Bill Clinton, establishes for the first time uniform governmentwide standards in granting security clearances. It grew out of a review of the case of former CIA employee Aldrich Ames, who was convicted of spying for the Soviet Union.

The order also eases concerns about those who have sought counseling on issues of mental health. Another provision gives security agencies greater

High Tech Gays is a professional association whose members must often obtain security clearances for their work.

"This has done something we could not have conceived of years ago," said Frank Kameny. His being denied a security clearance in 1957 led him to champion that cause for nearly four decades. "It not merely gets the government to pull back its claws as an active, hostile adversary, but to do a 180 degree about-face and offer actual affirmative protection."

But Kameny harbors some reservations as well. One is that the administration has refused to rescind the 1953 executive order 10450, which labels "sexual perversion"—a code word for homosexuality—as grounds for denial of a security clearance. Furthermore, the new order defers to



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access to the financial records of its employees, a measure which concerns some civil libertarians.

The president's move complements parallel efforts in employment matters. Over the last two years, individual departments and agencies of the federal government have added sexual orientation to their nondiscrimination clauses for employment.

It is "an important step toward ending governmentally sanctioned job discrimination against gay and lesbian people," said Elizabeth Birch, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund.

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Praise also came from Bill Weaver, president of High Tech Gays, who said, "Sexual orientation has nothing to do with one's trustworthiness."

older orders when there are conflicts between them.

"The question becomes what you get when some homophobic agency security clearance director decides to invoke that," Kameny is "left uneasy by that sort of thing." He counsels "vigilance."

Outright opposition to the executive order came from the radical right. "This is a moral slap at the face of the traditional family...because in all healthy societies, homosexuality is recognized as a pathology with very serious implications for a person's behavior," said Robert Maginnis of the Family Research Council.

Lesbians and gay men should still exercise some caution. While sexual orientation alone may no longer serve as the basis for denial of a security clearance, lying about it can be. Living a closeted life, ashamed of one's orientation, may well be interpreted as grounds for potential blackmail and hence denial of a clearance.

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