

Frustration on all sides with 'half-baked' JTTF involvement

BY BECKY STRAUS
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

After the third year in a row of a disappointingly vague report from the Portland Police Bureau on its cooperation with the Joint Terrorism Task

Force, frustrated City Council members appear ready to revisit Portland's nebulous relationship with the FBI.

Mayor Charlie Hales is quick to remind those tuning in that, as city commissioner, he cast the lone "No" vote in opposition to joining the JTTF in 2001. As mayor, he has repeatedly expressed his skepticism around the effectiveness of the current arrangement, which allows for PPB to cooperate with the JTTF on a case-by-case basis. Hales has referred to the scheme as "half-baked" and has warned that even further entanglement could retract from the true community policing mission of the bureau he is working to reform. Echoed by three other commissioners at a recent City Council hearing, the mayor's intention to open up the ordinance to redefine the relationship or abandon it altogether is a welcome discussion.

In 2011, the ACLU of Oregon came out in support of the limited involvement model under which the Bureau's JTTF participation operates today. According to the ordinance (Council Resolution 36859), Portland's local law enforcement agents assist the FBI on investigations of

suspected terrorism that have a criminal nexus, subject to the limitations of Oregon law. Though certainly not perfect, the current framework is designed to ensure that when officers cooperate with the FBI they do not run afoul of Oregon's well-established and highly protective civil rights laws. Moreover, it is intended to permit both the police chief and the mayor to be fully briefed in order to properly supervise the Portland personnel assisting the JTTF.

A layer of transparency over this collaboration is meant to serve as a vital safeguard against the threat of unlawful law enforcement activity. And yet, annual reports from the bureau in each of the three years since the ordinance took effect have been minimal. Citing unexplained concerns that disclosure could compromise public safety, the bureau has declined to report important details of its involvement including the number of investigations, the types of investigations, the stage of the investigations, and the number of hours the investigating officers spend on terrorism inquiries.

The inadequate reports suggest to City Council and to the community members it represents that we are expected to proceed with a blind acquiescence to the Bureau's cooperation with the JTTF, despite a well-documented history of abuses by the FBI of the constitutionally protected activity of law-abiding U.S. citizens and residents. In fact, U.S. Attorney for Oregon Amanda Marshall advocates for even closer and more

consistent involvement.

Not surprisingly, the commissioners are not comfortable taking that "trust us" approach. That the FBI denied secret security clearance to Hales serves only to exacerbate the unease. The mayor's ability to effectively manage the "as-needed" cooperation with the FBI is at best compromised when he is just as in the dark about the Bureau's activities as the rest of us.

It is clear that discussions will be renewed in the coming year about how best to lend City resources to the FBI, if at all. What is less clear is what will result. The ACLU supports a structure that enables law enforcement at all levels to protect us from true threats of terrorism, but not at the expense of our fundamental civil rights. Portland should be a nationwide leader in our approach of limited cooperation with the FBI and serve as the model of transparency that we hoped for when the ACLU signed on to the 2011 ordinance. The Bureau should eliminate unnecessary secrecy and give the public and our elected leaders the information necessary to verify that Portland police are following Oregon law and our constitution.

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Becky Straus is the legislative director with the ACLU of Oregon. She directs advocacy and lobbying efforts before the Oregon Legislature and is the ACLU's primary lobbyist on City of Portland matters.

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Wandering Beggars

by Vicky Franklin

Wandering Beggars

Parasite to this host called "Society"

Stigmatized as the Anonymous

No acknowledgement

Plague the public with the audacity to "Ask"

"Do you have or Can I have?"

Your money and leftovers...

Isn't that what they consider us?

Leftovers...

Seasoned with debris, laying on cement pavements

For us the hardest season is winter

But the people who stereotype us are the coldest ever

Assumed reasons for our conditions

Their conclusion

We are metropolitan exclusions

Write us off... the streets

Implement public policies

Criminalize us for ruining the scenery

Occupy land use as our bedding

Tenants of public space, eminent domain

Lack resources, so we do what we can to be self-sustained

We are people who are homeless

Doesn't mean that we are not human

But to society we are referred to everything that is offensive

If we weren't why do lawmakers make laws to apprehend us

All we have left is our dignity

And we fight for that each day

Despite the stares and rude comments

As the public walk past as if we were not even there

But don't get us wrong, I know some care

Menu for today is bitten off sandwiches

Backwashed sodas

This isn't the life that we chose

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