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Muslim Advocates Voices Concerns Over Leahy-Feinstein PATRIOT Act Reauthorization

Bill fails to protect the rights of law-abiding Americans

(SAN FRANCISCO) October 8, 2009—As the Senate Judiciary Committee votes today on the Leahy-Feinstein bill to reauthorize the USA PATRIOT Act, [Muslim Advocates](#)—a national legal advocacy and educational organization—raises concerns over the bill’s language, which continues to allow overreaching government surveillance of law-abiding Americans. The vote comes just weeks after Muslim Advocates [filed suit](#) in federal court demanding the FBI release its surveillance guidelines, which unfairly target specific religious and ethnic communities.

“The Leahy-Feinstein proposal is flawed because it continues to allow the government to monitor the online reading, email, phone calls, financial, travel and other activities of law-abiding Americans,” said Muslim Advocates Executive Director and former Senate Judiciary Committee counsel Farhana Khera. “Congress should reform the PATRIOT Act to require the government’s surveillance powers to be focused on suspected terrorists and spies, not law-abiding Americans.”

The JUSTICE Act, an alternative to Leahy-Feinstein introduced by Senators Feingold and Durbin, allows the FBI ample authority for intelligence-gathering and eliminates the *carte blanche* surveillance approach perpetuated by Leahy-Feinstein. For example, while Leahy’s version continues to permit the government to demand that Amazon.com produce its records for everyone who has ever ordered a specific book—for instance, a Koran—the JUSTICE Act would curtail the search to only those who are suspected terrorists or spies.

The JUSTICE Act would also amend existing law to ensure that well-intentioned charitable giving is not punishable as a crime, a step forward in fulfilling President Obama’s commitment made in June to ease hurdles to charitable giving facing American Muslims.

“Current debate on reauthorizing the PATRIOT Act should not be viewed in isolation,” added Khera. “The PATRIOT Act is part of a broader set of intelligence gathering powers and activities that have been implemented without open and honest public debate.” Muslim Advocates will continue to push for transparency and accountability of the government’s immense law enforcement powers and for revisions to those powers that protect both the nation’s security and the rights and privacy of the American people.

Muslim Advocates (www.muslimadvocates.org) is a national legal advocacy and educational organization dedicated to promoting freedom, justice and equality for all, regardless of faith, by providing leadership through legal advocacy, policy engagement, and civic education, and by serving as a legal resource to promote the full and meaningful participation of Muslims in American public life.