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Contact:

Veena Dubal - Staff Attorney, ALC

(415) 896-7733

Summer Hararah - Program Coordinator, ALC

(415) 848-7714

Civil Rights Groups Seek Records of FBI Surveillance of Mosques in Northern CA

Groups Request to Examine Dragnet in Muslim American Communities

SAN FRANCISCO - The ACLU of Northern California (ACLU-NC), The Asian Law Caucus (ALC), and the San Francisco Bay Guardian filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request today seeking records relating to federal government activity in connection to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) investigation of Muslim communities. The groups seek records related to domestic intelligence practices including the use of informants and infiltrators (such as those reportedly used in gyms, community centers and mosques), the FBI Junior Agent Program's recruitment of Muslim and Arab American children, and investigations of Muslim leaders and imams in northern California.

"According to civil rights organizations, community members, and media reports, the FBI has engaged in a deliberate plan to infiltrate Muslim communities through the use of informants and covert actions. Tensions are especially high between the FBI and Muslim groups following the death of Imam Luqman Ameen Abdullah, a Detroit cleric who was killed under questionable circumstances during an FBI raid in October 2009.

"When there are repeated and widespread reports that the FBI is building a dragnet that is detrimental to the lives of innocent Americans, the ACLU and other civil rights

organizations must step in," said Julia Harumi Mass, staff attorney of the ACLU-NC. "The first step is to see all the records regarding the planning and implementation of any such spying and surveillance programs, including those that target children and have a potential chilling effect on free speech and religious practices."

Despite official overtures, including a recent statement by Attorney General Eric Holder that "the tension that arises [between the Muslim American community and the FBI] is unacceptable," many Muslim religious and cultural organizations question the intent and effectiveness of FBI activities in their environment.

"Muslim Americans play an important role in domestic intelligence investigations. That is why we want to examine the policies and investigative practices that are intrusive to our communities and that ultimately could be dangerous for our country as a whole," said Veena Dubal, staff attorney at the Asian Law Caucus.

"If the federal government is going to spend taxpayer dollars on a questionable enforcement action, the public has the right to know the details of how it was implemented," said Tim Redmond of the San Francisco Bay Guardian.

The ACLU-NC has requested expedited processing because of the urgency of this issue to members of several northern California communities.

Mass added: "We are seeking expedited processing because there is urgency to inform the public concerning federal government activity. Initial reports have caused widespread anxiety in Muslim communities and raised widespread concerns about the federal government's misconduct, including racial and religious profiling and violations of the constitutional rights of United States residents in northern California." If expedited processing is granted, the FOIA request will be processed "as soon as practicable," and prior to the agency's large backlog of less urgent requests.