

Thursday, March 3, 2016

The Honorable Sheri Pym
Magistrate Judge
Central District of California 3470 12th Street
Riverside, CA 92501

Honorable Judge Pym:

We write to draw your attention to the dangerous implications of the FBI's request in its case against Apple. No party should wield the power to force private companies to weaken the security of all in order to investigate a few.

Please know that we are all unequivocally saddened by and opposed to the terrorist attack in San Bernardino last year. At the same time, we do not believe fear should distract from the need to protect civil liberties.

By requiring Apple to dismantle its security protections, millions of iPhone users — government officials and civilians alike — risk falling victim to cyberattacks, which ultimately threaten domestic and national security.

As activists supporting the Black Lives Matter movement and other social justice imperatives, there is even more at stake.

As Rev. Jesse Jackson recalled last week, one need only look to the days of J. Edgar Hoover and wiretapping of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. to recognize the FBI has not always respected the right to privacy for groups it did not agree with. Even the FBI now agrees COINTELPRO amounted to a violation of the First Amendment.

And many of us, as civil rights advocates, have become targets of government surveillance for no reason beyond our advocacy or provision of social services for the underrepresented.

We urge you to consider the dire implications for free speech and civil liberties if the FBI is permitted to force Apple to create technology to serve its investigatory purposes.

The FBI's historically questionable surveillance procedures do not bode well for setting a precedent that allows the agency universal access to private smartphone data.

Thank you for your consideration.

[Signatories below]

Beats, Rhymes & Relief
Center for Media Justice
The Gathering for Justice
Justice League NYC
Shaun King, Senior Justice Writer, NY Daily News
Opal Tometi, Co-Founder of Black Lives Matter and Director of Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)