Se to the NEWS

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CHILLING OUR LAW ENFORCEMENT

As we emerge from an unusually severe winter, it might be an appropriate time to examine a wintry slogan that refers to the political dimate rather than the weather. The term "chilling effect" has been appearing in legal briefs with increasing frequency.

It is argued that practically all police or intelligence investigation of terror ists, extremists, Communists, por-nographers, and libelmongers should be terminated because of its "chilling effect" on the rights of free speech, free press, and legitimate dissent.

Because of this slogan and the litigation it has spawned, what is actually being chilled is the morale and efficiency of our law enforcement agencies and, more important, their ability to protect the safety of our people.

Attorney General-designate Griffin Bell1s announcement that he would fire FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley because "the FBI Director should change with each administratioh\ was accurately described by Senator John C. Danforth as "an unforgiveable politicization of the FBI.''

There are presently some 75 lawsuits pending against various law enforcement agencies, from the FBI to local police departments, trying to force them to divest themselves of their intelligence files and operations, or to make public their sensitive information on extremist groups.

This accelerating harassment of our law enforcement agencies has had its effect both in and out of court. In 1973 New York City's police commissioner announced that 80 percent of the intelligence files relating to "public security matters" had been purged from the records, and Baltimore police reported that they had "destroyed all their intelligence files on so-called activist groups."

In 1974 the Texas State Safety Division stated that authorities had "wiped out

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all of its files on subversives and subversive organizations," and the Mayor of Los Angeles announced that police had "destroyed almost two million entry items in their [intelligence] files."

In 1975 a judge ordered the Subversive Activities Unit of the Michigan State Police disbanded and its files on 50,000 persons destroyed. In 1976 the Mayor of Memphis ordered the police department intelligence unit disbanded and its records burned.

In order to get out from under the pressure of such legal harassment, many law enforcement agencies are destroying the intelligence files they have laboriously built up over many years and are disbanding their units designed to monitor extremist groups.

In some cities, the majority of police intelligence files have been purged to make them conform to new and highly restrictive federal standards that forbid police to keep files on extremist groups such as the Trotskyite Communists, the Maoist Communists, or the Moscow Communists.

Although six different national cri commissions since 1963 have urged the pool ing of information and the coordination of plans among federal, regional, state and local police intelligence units, many local law enforcement agencies now believe they should not risk sharing their intelligence with federal agencies.

One senior police officer said the police department "wou1d be better off if they abolished the [intelligence] bureau and concentrated on handing out traffic tickets."

Yet the need for the defense of our citizens against terrorist organizations is growing, not diminishing. The FBI estimated in 1974 that there are more than 15,000 terrorists in this country organized into 21 different groups. The Symbionese Liberation Army at one time had a "hit" list of 900 intended victims.

There is also the increasing possibility that terrorists may steal material to make homemade nuclear bombs that could kill tens of thousands of people in one blast.

It isn't enough for a few privileged private citizens such as Nelson Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger, and William Simon, to be given Secret Service protection. The rest of us need protection, too. If the American people don't speak up, the chill that has been put on police intelligence will soon descend to a freeze in law enforcement.

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