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FBI Translator to Sue for Investigation Report

By Justin Rood, CQ Staff

An FBI whistleblower is preparing to sue the Justice Department to force the release of an inspector general's investigation into her claims of malfeasance in an FBI translation unit, her lawyer said this week.

Sibel Edmonds, a former FBI translator, already is suing the FBI for wrongful termination arising from her dismissal in 2002 after she alleged that some bureau translators intentionally slowed the pace of their work to create a backlog of material; that material went untranslated or was poorly translated; and that the security of the program had been breached.

Attorney General John Ashcroft - asserting what is known as state secrets privilege - has requested the case be dismissed because it may expose national security information. Last month, Ashcroft ordered that information about the case - some of which had been in the public realm for two years - be classified.

That order spawned a separate lawsuit, filed June 23 by the public interest group Project On Government Oversight (POGO), charging that Ashcroft's classification order was illegal and unconstitutional.

Shortly after Ashcroft issued the order, two senators removed letters related to the Edmonds case from their Web sites.

Sens. Patrick J. Leahy, D-Vt., and Charles E. Grassley, R-Iowa, had posted at least two letters to the Justice Department in which they inquired about a Justice Department inspector general's investigation into the Edmonds claims. The senators decided to remove the letters "to be on the safe side," said Leahy spokeswoman Tracy Schmalzer.

The report on the IG's investigation into some of Edmonds' claims, launched in 2002, still is pending, but Edmonds is preparing to file a suit compelling the release of the report, according to her lawyer in Washington, D.C., Mark Zaid.

Below are several letters between Grassley and Leahy and the Justice Department relating to the FBI's translation program, including Edmonds' charges.

* March 2, 2004, letter to Sen. Orrin Hatch

<http://homeland.cq.com/hs/flatfiles/temporaryItems/20040624_letter1.pdf>

* March 2, 2004, letter to Attorney General John Ashcroft and FBI Director Robert Mueller

<http://homeland.cq.com/hs/flatfiles/temporaryItems/20040624_letter2.pdf>

* Aug. 21, 2002, letter to Sens. Patrick Leahy and Charles Grassley

<http://homeland.cq.com/hs/flatfiles/temporaryItems/20040624_letter3.pdf>

* Aug. 13, 2002, letter to Attorney General John Ashcroft

<http://homeland.cq.com/hs/flatfiles/temporaryItems/20040624_letter4.pdf>

* July 8, 2002, letter to Sens. Patrick Leahy and Charles Grassley

<http://homeland.cq.com/hs/flatfiles/temporaryItems/20040624_letter5.pdf>

* June 19, 2002, letter to Inspector General Glenn Fine

<http://homeland.cq.com/hs/flatfiles/temporaryItems/20040624_letter6.pdf>

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