

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 11, 2024

The Honorable William J. Burns
Director
Central Intelligence Agency
1000 Colonial Farm Rd.
McLean, Virginia 22101

The Honorable Christopher A. Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20535

Dear Directors Burns and Wray:

We are writing to you as members of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI), with a profound sense of duty towards ensuring transparency, accountability, and the protection of civil rights and civil liberties in our nation's intelligence operations. As you both know well, your agencies' history of surveillance and disruption of groups opposing the Vietnam War and fighting for racial justice for African Americans is well known; FBI's COINTELPRO and CIA's Operation CHAOS have both been described extensively in declassified, released documents.¹

Media reporting and certain disclosures from the FBI indicate that surveillance activities were conducted on the Latino civil rights movement, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s.² The historical record on those activities that is available to the public, however, is much less robust.

The Latino civil rights movement was a pivotal period in our nation's history, marked by the struggle for equality, justice, and recognition of the fundamental rights of Latino Americans. Reports have surfaced over the years suggesting that CIA and FBI may have been involved in monitoring and collecting information on activists and organizations that were part of this movement. For example, according to the *Dallas Morning News*, an FBI informant infiltrated the Dallas chapter of the American G.I. Forum, a Mexican American organization that advocated for

¹ S. Rep. No 94-755, at 96 (Church Committee Report, Vol. II) (hereafter "Church Report").

² Although I am unaware of information about MH/CHAOS specifically related to the Latino civil rights movement, it is not implausible that surveillance or disruption was conducted given, that, as the Church Committee noted, the Operation's "originally stated objective was 'to find out [the] extent to which Soviets, Chicoms (Chinese Communists) and Cubans are exploiting' the United States' "domestic problems"—a category that, in the context of the time, could well have included the Latino civil rights movement. *See* Church Report at 100.

Moreover, if, after a thorough search, no records are identified linking MH/CHAOS to surveillance or disruption of the Latino civil rights movement, that, too, would be a valuable addition to the historical record.

equal treatment.³ The *Los Angeles Times* has also documented use of numerous FBI confidential informants to surveil Cesar Chavez.⁴

And—perhaps even more importantly—the historical record is not clear about whether FBI (or CIA) engaged in surveillance of the First Amendment protected activities of the Latino civil rights movement (which would itself be deeply concerning) or whether it progressed beyond that to affirmative attempts to sabotage or disrupt the movement, as the FBI did with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.⁵

Given the historical significance of these events, we hereby request that:

1. FBI and CIA collect and publicly release any materials pertaining to surveillance of the Latino civil rights movement following appropriate classification reviews of such materials;
2. To the extent that any such materials are still currently and properly classified—which would be surprising more than a half-century after the records’ creation—I request that you declassify those materials to the maximum extent possible to ensure a full historical record;
3. You share with the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence any materials related to the surveillance of the Latino civil rights movement that are still classified for review by the members and staff of this Committee; and
4. If no records of surveillance of the Latino civil rights movement are identified, please describe to HPSCI the methods used to search for those records, the better to ensure that the full historical story can be told.

The declassification of materials related to the surveillance of the Latino civil rights movement would not only align with our commitment to transparency and civil liberties but would also contribute to a more inclusive understanding of American history. It is imperative that we

³ “Dallas Mexican-Americans Remember the JFK Years, Surveillance by FBI,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 13, 2013, available at <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/2013/09/14/dallas-mexican-americans-remember-the-jfk-years-surveillance-by-fbi>.


⁴ Alan C. Miller, “FBI Spied on Cesar Chavez for Years, Files Reveal,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1995, available at <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-05-30-mn-7622-story.html>.


⁵ For example, the FBI did not merely surveil Dr. King, but attempted to disrupt the activities of his movement by disclosing sensitive personal activities to the press and writing a forged letter purportedly from an associate suggesting that he commit suicide. See, e.g., Sam Briger, “Documentary Exposes How the FBI Tried to Destroy MLK with Wiretaps, Blackmail,” *National Public Radio*, January 18, 2021, available at <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/18/956741992/documentary-exposes-how-the-fbi-tried-to-destroy-mlk-with-wiretaps-blackmail>.

continue to confront and address these aspects of our past to ensure that such overreaches do not occur in the future.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your timely, positive response. Please consider this request as an opportunity for our Intelligence Community to demonstrate its commitment to the principles of democracy and justice for all Americans.

Sincerely,


Joaquin Castro
Member
House Permanent Select
Committee on Intelligence


Jimmy Gomez
Member
House Permanent Select
Committee on Intelligence