

## 400 F.B.I. Agents To Handle Demands For File Information

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WASHINGTON, March 17—The Federal Bureau of Investigation, besieged by thousands of citizens who want to know what the bureau has in its files about them, will summon 400 agents here this summer in an effort to eliminate a backlog of Freedom of Information requests.

In a statement today that referred to "an avalanche" of paper work, "massive waves" of requests and a "multimillion dollar effort" to answer the queries, F.B.I. Director Clarence M. Kelley said that two groups of 200 agents each would be assembled here from across the nation to deal with the matter.

Mr. Kelley said that the project would cost about \$6.5 million and would last six months.

Several bureau sources said privately that the heads of many of the bureau's field offices across the country were upset about the project because of the requirement that all 400 agents involved be lawyers. There are only about 1,200 lawyers among the approximately 8,500 special agents, and, one source said, "The SACs (Special Agents in Charge of field offices) are not happy to lose their lawyers for so long a time."

### Effect on Investigations

In his own statement, Mr. Kelley dropped several hints that the project might hinder the bureau's crime-fighting functions. "Aside from the cost factor, we cannot ignore the fact that by diverting these field agents from their normal duties, we will be losing about 85 man-years in investigative effort," he said.

Several staff members of Congressional oversight committees were quick to challenge this, however, saying privately they had understood that agents who had been involved in domestic security work before it was severely curtailed by former Attorney General Edward H. Levi, would be able to handle the backlog of information requests.

Mr. Kelley said that the backlog involved "nearly 10 million pages," and that new requests for information were coming in daily. A bureau spokesman said that the actual number of requests was 7,042, and that the much larger figure of "nearly 10 million pages" was based on the numerous files that must be searched to meet every request.

A bureau official, Thomas Harrington, said that many requests have come from persons on whom the bureau has no information at all, but that a great deal of effort is needed to check all of the files to make certain there is no information on record—particularly if the person has a common name, such as Smith or Jones.

Each group of agents is scheduled to work 10 hours a day, six days a week, in 11-week cycles, beginning the first week in May.

Last year, the bureau processed 13,807 Freedom of Information requests. It could not be learned how many new files were started in that same period.