

Wiretaps Decline, But Cost Goes Up

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State and federal prosecutors obtained 728 wiretapping warrants last year, 136 fewer than in 1973, but the national bill for court-ordered electronic eavesdropping rose from \$4.5 million to \$5.5 million, a report to Congress showed yesterday.

The seventh annual report of the Administrative Office of U.S. Courts, summarizing activity under the 1968 federal wiretap law, disclosed that once again Justice Department lawyers obtained permission to tap a telephone every time they asked a federal judge for it.

There were 121 federal court wiretap orders in 1974, down from 130 the year before and less than half of the 285 warrants issued in the peak year, 1971.

State courts, led as usual by New York and New Jersey, issued 607 tap orders last year, down 17 per cent from the record 734 in 1973.

William Lynch, chief of the Justice Department's organized crime section, said the reduced federal eavesdropping was the result of "increased sophistication" by racketeers in avoiding taps and the fact that wiretapping requires many man-hours and much paperwork.

Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark refused to use the authority given by the 1968 law, calling wiretapping a waste of government resources and a needless invasion of privacy.

Under the Nixon and Ford administrations, officials at Justice pointed out yesterday, each of the 945 federal wiretaps since 1969 has yielded an average of five arrests and two convictions.

The cost of federal wiretapping, which peaked at \$2.2

million in 1971, fell to \$1.3 million last year, but the 16 states using their own wiretap laws raised the total national cost to \$5.5 million.

Average state and federal wiretap costs rose to \$8,067 per installation, up from \$5,632 in 1973. The most costly single eavesdrop \$159,963 was conducted by a New York special prosecutor who wiretapped a business office for six months during a bribery investigation.

The federal wiretap law re-

quires the administrative office, bookkeeper for the federal court system, to assemble warrant statistics from judges and prosecutors in state and federal courts. The annual reports often are cited in debates over the expense and effectiveness of wiretapping.

Suspected gambling and narcotics operators continued to top the list of wiretap targets. Of the 728 state and federal eavesdrop orders in 1974,

281 were for gambling and 199 were for drugs.

Two federal warrants involved kidnaping. One was a 22-day tap last April and May in California, believed to be part of the investigation of the Patricia Hearst kidnaping. The other authorized planting a microphone and tapping a telephone in the cellblock of the U.S. District Court here during the five days when prisoners held hostages.