

# FOI, Privacy Acts Costly

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It cost 13 federal law enforcement agencies almost \$36 million to comply with the revised Freedom of Information Act and the new privacy acts in the three years after they became law, the General Accounting Office said yesterday.

The congressional auditing agency said most of the money went for salaries of federal employes hired to sort through citizen requests for information, process them and decide whether to make the files public.

More than a third of the total, \$13.8 million, was spent by the FBI, although the Immigration and Naturalization Service handled more requests in that period, 51,199, compared to the FBI's 43,366.

The laws allow public access to government documents, including law enforcement files, except where exempted in cases such as national se-

curity, personnel matters, trade secrets and police informants.

The report said the 13 agencies that do investigative work—ranging from the FBI and the Postal Service to the military security agencies — handled about 147,000 requests for information in fiscal 1975 through 1977. A revised FOI law and the new privacy act took effect in 1975.

"The most dominant category of requestors reported by many of the agencies was individuals who have been or are subjects of investigations by the agencies," the GAO said. "Some of these requestors were also identified as being criminals."

A Senate Judiciary subcommittee has held hearings for more than a year on the subject, taking testimony from federal law enforcement officials who say FOI requirements are costly and can help criminals and spies.

They argue that criminal conspirators can request information not only on themselves but on cohorts who can be spotted as informants if they don't have a file.

Similarly, they say, spies can get information from government files on methods used to trap them or any matter that might be of help to their government.

Additionally, the officials have testified, the knowledge that records could become public has cut down on the willingness of local police to send information to Washington and on the ability of the agencies to promise confidentiality to informants.