

FBI DIRECTOR SAYS

Law Helps Gangsters Find Informers

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WASHINGTON — Prison inmates and organized crime are using the Freedom of Information Act to identify informants who sent them to jail, FBI Director William Webster has told Congress.

Webster, who recently advocated a 10-year moratorium on disclosure of closed criminal investigative files, said Wednesday 16 percent of all FOIA requests received by the FBI now come from prisoners.

"To our knowledge, no informant has suffered physical harm as a result of an FOIA disclosure," Webster told a House

Government Operations subcommittee.

"But absence of a victim does not lessen our concern. We know that requesters are working together, pooling FOIA information, to identify sources," Webster said.

"For example, we know that an organized crime group made a concerted effort to identify sources through the Freedom of Information Act," Webster said. "Our experience tells us that in many instances their requests are being made for the purpose of identifying the informants who 'probably' were responsible for their incarceration."

Webster said the FBI receives 60 FOIA requests a day, and its responses run 19,000 pages a year. He said there was no way the FBI could answer the FOIA requests within the 10 to 20 working day time limit set by law.

The FOI, enacted in 1966, established the general principle that any person should have access to records maintained by Executive Branch agencies.

Following revelation that the FBI and intelligence agencies kept files on many unsuspecting Americans, it was amended in 1974 to establish strict time limits for compliance by the agencies.