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U.S. Drops Suit on Mass. Criminal File

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BOSTON, Sept. 25—The federal government today said it is withdrawing its court suit to gain blanket access to Massachusetts' computerized criminal history files.

The suit was filed last spring on behalf of two agencies—the Small Business Administration and the Defense Investigation Services—which had been denied access to the files by the Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board.

The Criminal History Board had denied access because neither agency met Massachusetts' requirements that such files be open only to criminal justice agencies and agencies with statutory authorization to use such files to conduct investigations.

In making a request that the suit be dismissed, Deputy U.S. Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus suggested that the two agencies seek authorization from Congress.

Massachusetts Gov. Francis W. Sargent hailed the Justice Department decision as a major victory. "We were fighting," he said, "to protect our right to privacy.

"The people of Massachusetts," Sargent said, "can take pride that once again they were in the forefront of an important effort to protect the rights of the individual."