

FBI Asks a Chief From The Ranks

Adding to President Nixon's Watergate woes, top officials of the FBI throughout the country urged him yesterday to select their new director from within the bureau's ranks.

Charles W. Bates, special agent in charge of the San Francisco office, responded when asked if the action was in violation of the FBI's traditional practice of silence:

"Yes, it's unprecedented, but then we've never had a situation like this before."

In a letter signed by all assistant directors and special agents in charge of bureau field offices, the officials said:

"In the search for a nominee for the FBI directorship, we urge consideration of the highly qualified professionals with impeccable credentials of integrity within the organization itself."

The letter made no mention of the Watergate scandal, which led to the resignation last week of acting director L. Patrick Gray III.

The letter, whose signatories included Bates, said:

"We do not suggest that there are not many other highly qualified leaders of proven integrity, but at this critical time it is essential that the FBI not flounder or lose direction in its service to the nation because of lack of law enforcement expertise nor of other qualities essential to the FBI directorship.

"None of us seeks personal gain — there is a vast reservoir of qualified executives within the FBI's officialdom from which a nominee could be selected."