

Security And Phone Tapping

Washington

White House Secret Service officials have claimed that their security responsibilities take priority over federal laws against telephone tapping when the two are in conflict, it was reported yesterday.

The Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. and the American Telephone and Telegraph Co. used this assertion of the Secret Service as part of their defense in a complaint about White House taps filed before the Federal Communications Commission.

In an answer to the complaint, attorneys said Secret Service officials responsible for White House security had "advised" the telephone companies that security responsibilities "take priority over the tariff requirements regarding customer recording of telephone conversations" if they are in conflict.

The complaint filed by Robert McCann, an electrical engineer of Hillsborough, Calif., charged the telephone companies with failure to enforce a regulation against customers' tapping telephone lines without using a "beeper" sound to alert callers.

The lawyers said that after the Senate Watergate committee heard testimony about existence of taps on White House telephones the companies had sent the White House a "letter concerning compliance with tariff provisions" and received a reply that the taps had been removed.

The telephone companies had directed their letter to special presidential assistant Bruce A. Kehrli and received a written reply August 17 from Leonard Garment, counsel to the President.

The White House also advised the Watergate committee that the taps had been removed, following the disclosure of their previous existence in testimony of former White House aide Alexander Butterfield.

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