

Inspector General's Report Concludes FBI Translator Fired for Reporting Misconduct

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Sibel Edmonds' Allegations Not Taken 'Seriously Enough,' DOJ Says

WASHINGTON-An unclassified summary of the Justice Department's Inspector General report into the termination of FBI translator Sibel Edmonds released today concludes that Edmonds was fired for reporting serious security breaches and misconduct in the agency's translation program.

"After almost three years since my wrongful termination, the government is finally admitting that the FBI acted improperly by firing me, and also affirming that my reports of serious problems within the agency were based on fact," said Edmonds, who is being represented by the American Civil Liberties Union in her lawsuit against the FBI. "However, the FBI has yet to conduct a thorough investigation into these allegations."

According to today's summary, the Inspector General's investigation found that many of Edmonds' claims "were supported, that the FBI did not take them seriously enough, and that her allegations were, in fact, the most significant factor in the FBI's decision to terminate her services."

The Inspector General's summary also criticizes the agency for not investigating Edmonds' allegations more thoroughly, comparing the FBI's mishandling of Edmonds' allegations to the mishandling of the case involving former FBI counterintelligence agent Robert Hanssen, who pled guilty to spying for the Soviet Union. The summary states that Edmonds' claims "raised serious concerns that, if true, could potentially have extremely damaging consequences for the FBI."

Furthermore, the Inspector General states, "By terminating Edmonds' services, in large part because of her allegations of misconduct, the FBI's actions also may have the effect of discouraging others from raising concerns."

Edmonds challenged her retaliatory dismissal by filing suit in federal court, but her case was dismissed last July after Attorney General John Ashcroft invoked the so-called "state secrets privilege," and retroactively classified briefings to Congress related to her case. The ACLU is representing Edmonds and filed a brief earlier this week urging the D.C. Court of Appeals to reinstate Edmonds' case.

"The Inspector General report leaves no doubt that John Ashcroft hid behind the state secrets privilege to cover up serious wrongdoing within the FBI," said ACLU Associate Legal Director Ann Beeson, who is representing Edmonds in her appeal. "The government's drastic actions to deny Ms. Edmonds her right to a day in court make a mockery of national security and the Constitution. Government employees who risk their careers to expose breaches in national security or misconduct are true American patriots and should be applauded, not punished."

The release of the Inspector General's unclassified summary follows a Freedom of Information Act request filed on behalf of Edmonds by attorney Mark S. Zaid, Managing Partner of the Washington, D.C. law firm Krieger and Zaid.

"The OIG unclassified summary reveals that Edmonds' most serious allegations were well-founded and served as the most significant factor in her unlawful firing by the FBI," said Zaid. "The Bureau should be ashamed of its conduct. It should not only apologize to Sibel but compensate her for their misconduct rather than continue to hide behind a false cloak of national security."

The ACLU said that the Inspector General's 35-page summary makes several scathing observations on the FBI's actions. Highlights include:

- "Finally...rather than investigate Edmonds' allegations vigorously and thoroughly, the FBI concluded that she was a disruption and terminated her contract." (p. 11)
- "In sum, we believe the FBI's initial inquiries in response to Edmonds' allegations were seriously deficient." (p. 24)
- "The FBI should not discourage employees or contractors from raising good-faith allegations of misconduct or mismanagement." (p. 31)
- "In light of the need for FBI vigilance about security issues, as demonstrated by the Hanssen case, we believe the FBI should have investigated these serious allegations more thoroughly." (p. 34)

Oral argument in Edmonds' case is scheduled for April 21, 2005. In addition to Beeson and Zaid, co-counsel in the case are: Melissa Goodman and Benjamin Wizner of the national ACLU; Art Spitzer of the ACLU of the National Capital Area; and Eric Seiff of New York.

For more information on the Edmonds case, including a copy of the ACLU's brief, go to: <http://www.aclu.org/SafeandFree/SafeandFree.cfm?ID=17301&c=206>.