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Restore the Fourth and Partners Call on President Obama to Take Closer, Critical Look at Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Programs

CVE Initiatives Perpetuate Discriminatory Law Enforcement Practices and Threaten Freedom of Expression

Belmont, MA – Today, Restore the Fourth and a coalition of civil rights organizations sent a joint [letter](#) to President Obama asking that he re-evaluate the ill-conceived and ineffective Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program. According to the government, CVE is an interagency initiative designed to [“develop and implement a full-range of partnerships to support and enhance efforts by key stakeholders to prevent radicalization and recruitment to violence by terrorist organizations.”](#) However, in practice, the program undermines community trust and cohesion, stigmatizes Muslims and Arab Americans, as well as risks criminalizing First Amendment-protected speech.

In particular, the coalition’s letter to the President outlined concerns related to the CVE program’s planned establishment of Shared Responsibility Committees (SRCs) – committees that would task educators, health workers, and religious leaders with identifying and reporting ‘radicalized’ community members. According to Restore the Fourth National Chair Alex Marthews, the SRCs “make a mockery of professional confidentiality, because the people they interview don’t know that the professional they’re interacting with is feeding information back to the FBI.”

In addition to cultivating a climate of distrust, the CVE program also endangers freedom of expression. For instance, the FBI’s “Don’t Be a Puppet” [website](#) promotes the policing of ideas by encouraging [“members of the public and particularly teenagers to identify and report language they regard as being ‘extreme’ or ‘radical’.”](#) Moreover, the government has been working aggressively to enlist the cooperation of Silicon Valley technology firms in facilitating [“counter-messaging and content monitoring initiatives”](#) on social media platforms.

According to Sue Udry, Executive Director of the Bill of Rights Defense Committee / Defending Dissent Foundation, “CVE programs incorrectly, and unconstitutionally, focus on political and religious beliefs to cast suspicion on Muslims and dissidents. These programs are fanning the flames of Islamophobia, and must be opposed.”

In light of the [lack of empirical research to support CVE programming](#) as well as the serious concerns expressed in relation to the CVE initiative's threats to freedom of expression, the letter to President Obama concluded with a call for the President to re-route ["the funds for CVE to programs with better evidentiary basis for their positive effect on levels of violence."](#) The White House's decision to do so would send an important ["message to American Muslims and critics of the U.S. government's foreign and domestic policies that you can indeed hold any belief that the First Amendment protects, without fear of U.S. government harassment."](#)

For Letter:

[CVE Letter to President Obama](#)

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