



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on June 11, 2024

FBI Suspends Employee's Security Clearance After Investigating Trump Support and Covid-19 Views

The FBI has come under intense scrutiny following allegations that it revoked the security clearance of an employee due to his political views and stance on the Covid-19 vaccine. A complaint filed with the Justice Department's internal watchdog, based on internal FBI files, highlights apparent politicization within the Bureau, raising significant concerns about freedom of expression and political neutrality in federal agencies.

According to [Empower Oversight](#), a nonprofit advocacy group representing the unnamed employee, the FBI "interrogated" his colleagues about his support for former President Donald Trump and his objections to the Covid-19 vaccinations. These actions were documented in internal files from the Bureau's Security Division, suggesting an investigatory focus that may have overstepped the boundaries of legitimate security concerns.



AP Images

The whistleblower, a 12-year veteran of the FBI, had his top-secret security clearance revoked in the aftermath of the January 6, 2021, Capitol protests. Empower Oversight detailed these events in a letter to Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz on Saturday [\[pdf\]](#).

This employee, who had earned commendations and high marks on performance evaluations, attended the "Save America" rally on January 6, 2021, while on personal leave and did not enter the Capitol grounds. He promptly reported his attendance to the FBI and voluntarily took a polygraph test, which found "no deception" in his claims. Despite this, the FBI suspended his security clearance in March 2022 and placed him on unpaid suspension during the investigation. His clearance was ultimately revoked by FBI Executive Assistant Director Jennifer Leigh Moore in April 2023, after which the whistleblower retired. He continues to challenge the decision through Empower Oversight due to its implications for his future employment opportunities.

The letter further details that fellow Bureau employees were presented with "pre-printed" questions by the Clearance Investigations Unit regarding the personal views of the colleague in question:

After inquiring whether the interviewed individual socialized with our client, the preprinted interview outline then lists the following questions, among others, about our client's First Amendment-protected activities:

- "Vocalize support for President Trump?"



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- “Vocalize objection to Covid-19 vaccination?”
- “Vocalize intent to attend 01/06/2021?”

The outline with these questions was used in at least three interviews of FBI employees who worked with our client.

The colleagues were instructed to respond “fully and truthfully,” with threats of potential action against their own security clearances or disciplinary repercussions. The questionnaire stressed, “Should you refuse to answer or fail to reply fully and truthfully, action against your security clearance may be undertaken and you may be referred to the Inspection Division for possible disciplinary action.”

According to the write-in answers, colleagues described the man as “definitely a Trump supporter” who has “right-wing views” and “strong Republican values” that were, however, “nothing extreme.” They added that his actions and words “never implied [he] would do anything physical” nor did they promote “violence.” He was also described as an “anti-vaxxer” who did not get his Covid-19 vaccine but who complied with the testing requirements.

Tristan Leavitt, president of Empower Oversight, accused the FBI’s Security Division of using the security-clearance process “to purge the FBI of employees who expressed disfavored political views or concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine requirement,” per the letter.

In this particular case, the “effort to purge employees worked”:

Due to [the] economic necessity imposed by the FBI’s Kafkaesque, never-ending internal appeal process and the procedural limits on any timely external remedy, our client chose to retire early rather than wait indefinitely for the FBI to rule on our appeal. The FBI forced our client to forego years of additional retirement credits, health benefits, and employment opportunities for expressing views that are supposed to be protected by the First Amendment.

Leavitt’s letter to Horowitz criticized the FBI for equating lawful expressions of political beliefs with severe threats: “Instead of limiting its investigation to legitimate issues, [the Security Division] acted as if support for President Trump, objecting to COVID-19 vaccinations, or lawfully attending a protest was the equivalent of being a member of Al Qaeda or the Chinese Communist Party,” he said.

Leavitt also cited U.S. Supreme Court precedent, which holds that terminating federal employees for “treasonable or seditious utterances or acts” violates the First Amendment, adding that the Bureau’s actions constituted “pure guilt by association.”

The letter points out that the case appears to be far from a singular instance of the FBI violating the First Amendment rights of its employees, “but likely on a systemic basis in many [other instances],” quoting as an example the second-highest FBI official, Deputy Director Paul Abbate, who “had told FBI special agents in charge that ‘anyone who questions the FBI’s response or his decisions regarding the response to January 6th did not belong in the FBI and should find a different job.’”

Leavitt called for Horowitz’s office to investigate the extent of these abuses and identify those responsible.

This letter follows a Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General (DOJ OIG) [probe in May](#), which found that the FBI had improperly retaliated against whistleblowers with suspended security



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clearances. That probe confirmed, according to the Levitt's statement to the [NY Post](#), that "the FBI has been illegally abusing the security clearance process to retaliate against whistleblowers."

The implications of this case are profound. Should the allegations be substantiated, they could signify a major breach of the foundational principles of impartiality and fairness within federal agencies. Moreover, this situation underscores concerns about the climate within the federal workforce concerning freedom of expression and political beliefs.

Empower Oversight's complaint comes amid broader allegations of bias within the FBI and its parent entity, the Department of Justice (DOJ), including evidence of [targeting pro-life activists](#), [labeling parents](#) outspoken at school-board meetings as a "terrorist threat," [and relying](#) on information from the far-left Southern Poverty Law Center [to label](#) mainstream conservative and Christian organizations as "hate groups" [akin to](#) the Ku Klux Klan.



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