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House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4501

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August 19, 2003

The Honorable John Ashcroft
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
Robert F. Kennedy Building
10th and Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Ashcroft:

I have recently read with great interest of your plans to conduct public meetings nationwide to discuss the USA Patriot Act and other similar related legislation. I welcome this move by you and your Department to more openly address the very serious, and in my view, very legitimate concerns that millions of Americans have about restrictions on their civil liberties. While all of us want to aggressively fight the threat of terrorism, we must do so in a manner that does not undermine our cherished civil liberties.

As you know, the American people have been speaking out and meeting for over a year in communities as diverse as Blount County, Tennessee, and Burlington, Vermont, to discuss how changes to our nation's laws governing surveillance and other law enforcement practices are unnecessarily weakening the very freedoms that form the foundation of our nation. To date, three state legislatures and over 140 cities and towns, representing over 17 million people, have passed resolutions expressing their opposition to certain portions of the USA Patriot Act and other legislation and anti-privacy initiatives put in place in the last two years.

Unfortunately, for months your Department has derided the concerns of these millions of Americans as a "propaganda campaign" and as "misleading the public." The Justice Department's cavalier dismissal has only increased the apprehension that an increasing number of people feel. They understand, and I agree, that if we compromise the foundations on which our society is based, the war on terrorism is already lost. For that reason, I am encouraged by the fact that you have personally chosen to meet with the American people on this issue.

In order to facilitate this nationwide discussion of the USA Patriot Act, I am extending an invitation to you to hold one of your national meetings in Vermont in conjunction with my office. I believe that with my office's assistance, this Vermont meeting would be very productive and extremely

well attended. As you know, I am sponsoring legislation, supported by American librarians, booksellers, and others, that would exempt libraries and bookstores from Section 215 of the Patriot Act. Therefore, I believe that the discussion at a Vermont town meeting would benefit those attending, as well as a broader American audience.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you might have about a meeting in Vermont or to let me know what dates would be convenient for you. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this proposal. I look forward to hearing from you. My staff will contact yours in the near future to follow up on this invitation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bernard Sanders", written in a cursive style.

Bernard Sanders
Member of Congress