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COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

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June 1, 2015

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable James B. Comey, Jr.
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20535

Dear Director Comey:

According to *The Washington Post*, two airplanes were spotted flying in circles over parts of West Baltimore for several days last month, following the riots concerning the death of Freddie Gray.¹ The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reportedly confirmed that it made planes available to the Baltimore Police Department for the purpose of “providing aerial imagery of possible criminal activity,” but that the FBI did not use cell-site simulators in any operation pertaining to the riots in Baltimore.²

Other reports have alleged that similar flights have been spotted in Chicago, Boston, California, and the Twin Cities.³ Please have knowledgeable FBI staff provide a briefing to Committee staff on this matter no later than June 12, 2015. Specifically, I would like to know (1) the scope, nature, and purpose of these operations; (2) what types of surveillance equipment were used in the operations, if not cell-site simulators; and (3) what legal authorities, if any, are being relied upon in carrying out these operations.

Should you have any questions, please contact Jay Lim of my Committee staff at (202) 224-5225. Thank you for your cooperation in this important matter.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Chairman

¹ Craig Timberg, “Surveillance planes spotted in the sky for days after West Baltimore rioting,” *The Washington Post*, May 5, 2015.

² *Id.*

³ Matt McKinney and John Rienan, “Mysterious low-flying plane over Twin Cities raises questions of surveillance: Small aircraft circled downtown Minneapolis, 2 malls for hours,” *StarTribune*, May 29, 2015; Kit O’Connell, “Department of Justice Flying Secret Airplane Fleet Over American Cities,” *Mint Press News*, May 27, 2015.