

Judge orders FBI to investigate witness tampering



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A federal judge has ordered the FBI to scrutinize allegations that the agency pressured a witness not to testify in a trial about videos related to the Oklahoma City bombing.

U.S. District Judge Clark Waddoups said the agency needs to get to the bottom of the claims from Utah lawyer Jesse Trentadue, who said that the FBI threatened to cut off a former government operative's benefits if he appeared in court.

An FBI attorney said Monday that Trentadue's allegations are baseless, and the only contact the agency was a cold call John Matthews placed to the Salt Lake City field office when he decided on his own not to testify. But Waddoups decided the lawyer's report raises disturbing questions, and he wanted evidence that the agency has thoroughly investigated the matter.

"If all of this is nonsense, let's bring this in and put an end to it," the judge said. Waddoups ordered the attorneys to present the results of the witness-tampering investigation on Nov. 13.

The hearing is the latest in a case that reignited questions about whether others were involved in the bombing that killed 168 people. Trentadue argues surveillance videos from 1995 show Timothy McVeigh had an accomplice. The agency says its investigators have done a reasonable search and found no evidence of additional unreleased videos.

Matthews was supposed to testify during a late July bench trial, but Trentadue argued that he backed out at the last minute because the FBI threatened to cut off his veteran's and disability benefits.

An agent was expected to testify Monday, but FBI attorney Kathryn Wyer said he shouldn't be exposed to allegations of misconduct for taking Matthews' phone call.

"This is another one of Mr. Trentadue's conspiracy theories," she said.

Under sharp questioning from the judge, Wyer said the agency didn't present more evidence of its position because no one connected to the FBI was involved with Matthews' decision not to testify.

Trentadue said Matthews was part of a stealth government operation before the Oklahoma City bombing tracking militia movements of which McVeigh was a part, and his testimony could support the idea that there was a second suspect.

Matthews told him and a colleague that he had been pressured in phone calls just before and after he was supposed to testify, the lawyer said. The FBI pointed to an emailed statement from Matthews saying that he had made the decision on his own.



Ultimately, Trenatdue wants the judge to let him search for tapes in the FBI archives.

He said a tape showing a second suspect would explain why his brother was flown to Oklahoma months after the bombing. His brother, who resembled a sketch of a suspect, died in a federal holding cell.