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Cornyn Seeks FBI Help in Texas Walkout

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Senator John Cornyn, a Republican of Texas, announced Thursday that the FBI has agreed to assist in locating Democratic Texas state legislators who fled the state to block a vote on a redistricting proposal. The lawmakers traveled to Illinois earlier this week, denying the Texas House the quorum needed to advance the map backed by President Donald Trump.

Cornyn's request to federal authorities adds a new dimension to the ongoing standoff between Texas Republicans and Democratic lawmakers, who have stationed themselves in a hotel in St. Charles, roughly 25 miles west of Chicago. The proposed congressional map

would shift five Democrat-held districts in favor of Republican candidates ahead of the 2026 midterm elections.

While no federal criminal charges have been filed, Cornyn suggested in a letter to the FBI that the lawmakers may have violated Texas bribery laws by accepting financial support from outside groups in connection with their legislative duties. He stated that the FBI has tools to assist state authorities when individuals cross state lines to avoid official obligations.

“I am proud to announce that Director Kash Patel has approved my request for the FBI to assist state and local law enforcement in locating runaway Texas House Democrats,” Cornyn said in a public statement.

Governor J.B. Pritzker of Illinois dismissed the effort as political theatre. “They’re grandstanding,” he said Wednesday. “There literally is no federal law applicable to this situation,” Pritzker argued that any federal presence in Illinois would serve more as intimidation than enforcement, since the lawmakers have not been charged with federal crimes.

As of Thursday morning, no FBI agents had been seen at the hotel housing the lawmakers. The Texas House has only issued civil warrants for absentee members, which historically are not enforceable outside of Texas jurisdiction.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, Cornyn’s primary challenger in the ongoing Senate race, has called for harsher penalties if the legislators fail to return by Friday’s scheduled roll call. He has proposed petitioning the Texas Supreme Court to declare their seats vacant. Governor Greg Abbott has similarly filed a lawsuit targeting Representative Gene Wu, who helped organize the walkout.

Paxton admitted that such legal efforts remain largely untested. Nevertheless, Cornyn’s campaign has already turned Paxton’s comments into a political ad, criticising him for not being forceful enough.

Democratic lawmakers in Washington have condemned the federal involvement, calling it an inappropriate use of FBI resources. Representative Hakeem Jeffries, House minority leader, questioned the move: “Shouldn’t the FBI be tracking down terrorists, drug traffickers, and child predators? We will not be intimidated.”

The dispute has drawn national attention as states on both sides of the political spectrum consider their redistricting responses. California and Illinois have hinted at reshaping their maps in retaliation, while other Republican-led states such as Indiana and Missouri are exploring similar efforts to Texas.