

November 29, 1996

BY HAND

The Honorable Louis J. Freeh  
Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation  
J. Edgar Hoover Building  
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20535

Re: Federal Bureau of Investigation Compliance with the  
JFK Assassination Records Collection Act, 44 U.S.C. § 2107

Dear Director Freeh:

Since 1994, the Assassination Records Review Board ("Review Board") has been working with a number of Federal agencies, including the FBI, to locate and and make public records related to the assassination of President Kennedy. These actions have been taken pursuant to The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992, 44 U.S.C. § 2107 (Supp. V 1994) ("JFK Act"). We have been working on a daily basis with Carol Keeley and other members of the FBI's JFK Task Force and greatly appreciate the cooperation we have received.

Although all Federal agencies have the same responsibilities under the JFK Act, we are mindful that discharging those responsibilities has required more effort from some agencies than from others. The FBI, in particular, has identified many more assassination records than any other agency. This volume of records is the natural consequence of President Johnson's designation of the FBI as the Federal agency responsible for investigating the assassination, the FBI's service as the investigative arm of the Warren Commission, and the large number of FBI records provided to assassination-related inquiries of the House Select Committee on Assassinations ("HSCA") and other Congressional bodies.

Given this volume of responsive records, the JFK Act's requirement that the FBI complete its processing of assassination records by August 1993 (*see* 44 U.S.C. § 2107(5)(c)) was not met. Indeed, representatives of the FBI have advised the Review Board that, at the present rate, the FBI probably will not complete processing its records under the JFK Act until at least the year 2004. The Review Board's current statutory authority will expire on September 30, 1997.

The Honorable Louis J. Freeh  
November 29, 1996  
Page 2

The purpose of this letter is to request your agency's cooperation in assisting the Review Board in discharging its responsibility of assuring Congress and the American people that the goals of the JFK Act will be accomplished to the greatest reasonable extent. We want to assure the American people that the United States Government has identified and located, and is in the process of releasing, all records relating to the assassination of President Kennedy. Indeed, one of the paramount purposes of the JFK Act is to certify to the public that the United States Government is not withholding relevant materials related to the assassination. *See, e.g., Assassination Materials Disclosure Act*, H.R. Rep. No. 625, Part 2, 102d Cong. 2d Sess. 9 (1992) ("The Federal Government's failure to release official materials has contributed to numerous conspiracy theories and fueled charges of government complicity in the assassination . . . [A] salutary purpose is served in opening these files [relating to the JFK assassination] to allay the suspicion of government cover-up.").

The Review Board has recently considered how it, along with the relevant Federal agencies, can best demonstrate to the American public that a thorough, good-faith, and diligent effort has been made to locate and release all remaining assassination-related records within the control of the United States Government (and that the Government is not hiding any such materials from public disclosure). Pursuant to the Congressional mandate under the JFK Act to "create an enforceable, independent, and accountable process for the public disclosure of such records," 44 U.S.C. § 2107(2)(a)(3), the Review Board seeks to have the relevant Federal agencies provide a complete and specific accounting of their efforts to locate and release assassination-related records, including a full explanation for any destruction of such records.

Accordingly, the Review Board requests that each relevant agency adhere to the formal compliance program (hereinafter "JFK Act Compliance Program") outlined below and devised by the Review Board pursuant to its powers under Section 7(j)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), and (F) of the JFK Act. We hereby request that you undertake the following measures by the dates provided (these dates were set in view of the fact that the Review Board's operations currently are scheduled to expire on September 30, 1997):

1. Designation of Agency Compliance Official (or officials) and statement of intent to comply with the JFK Act. We request that by December 13, 1996, your agency designate an Agency Compliance Official who ultimately will be responsible for ensuring that the agency has complied with its obligations under the JFK Act, including the identification, location, and organization of assassination records and the transmission of those records to the National Archives and Records Administration ("National Archives"). Although the Review Board assumes that Carol Keeley will

serve in this position, we nevertheless await your formal confirmation. If necessary, your agency may designate additional persons with knowledge of the measures that have been undertaken to locate assassination records.

We also request that by December 13 the agency convey its agreement to adhere to the compliance procedures outlined in this letter. To the extent that any compliance procedure described below appears to be unreasonable or to present difficulties that we may not have anticipated, please explain why and make alternate suggestions to us.

2. Initial Statement of Compliance. We request that the Agency Compliance Official prepare by January 13, 1997, an initial written statement of the agency's compliance with the JFK Act ("Statement of Compliance"), setting forth the steps that the agency has taken to locate and process assassination records. The Review Board recognizes that many of the relevant Federal agencies, including the FBI, have previously written letters to the Review Board apprising it of their progress at various stages of identifying and processing assassination records under the JFK Act. The Initial Statement of Compliance, while it may include information previously reported to the Board, is to be a preliminary draft of the agency's comprehensive and final report to the American public of what it has done to locate records relating to the assassination. (See number 4 below.) This Initial Statement of Compliance shall include, to the fullest reasonable extent, the following information:
  - a. A complete description of all steps that your agency took to identify and locate assassination records including, but not limited to, an identification of the major record collections and files that were consulted in the agency's search, any departmental file indices consulted, the names and titles of the persons who were responsible for conducting the searches, the physical locations of the records that were searched, the off-site storage facilities (*e.g.*, Federal Records Centers) searched, the specific steps that were taken to locate and retrieve materials in archives, and any other criteria used by the agency to locate assassination records.
  - b. Certification of your agency's responses to specific requests of the Review Board to provide certain additional records or information. In the case of the FBI, we have made both written requests, numbered FBI-1, FBI-2, etc., and

oral requests (usually in cases where a written request may have involved creating a classified or otherwise sensitive document). We request that the Initial Statement of Compliance address the FBI's responses to both forms of requests. In cases where your agency has not been able to provide all of the information we requested, the Initial Statement should explain what steps have been taken to locate the requested information, and explain why some or all of the requested information has not been made available.

- c. To the extent that any assassination-related records have been destroyed by the FBI or any FBI official, a full and specific explanation of the circumstances surrounding the destruction of such records. In the case of the FBI, we understand there are also certain records or files that remain "on locate," *i.e.*, that the JFK Task Force has attempted to retrieve as at least potentially responsive to the JFK Act, but that apparently cannot be found. We request a full explanation for the inability of the FBI to locate these records, including a description of the material "on locate," an explanation of how the material was identified as responsive or potentially responsive to the JFK Act, and a statement of what steps have been taken to locate the material.
  - d. The status of identifiable remaining work that needs to be completed by your agency in order to comply fully with the JFK Act, including an identification of the categories of records that must be processed and transmitted to the National Archives, a description of any additional searches for files that must be done, and the projected completion date for each of these tasks.
3. Review Board Interview With Agency Compliance Official (or Officials). Shortly after the submission of the agency's Initial Statement of Compliance, we ask that the Agency Compliance Official (as well as any persons who helped prepare the agency's initial Statement of Compliance) be made available to the Review Board for an interview regarding the location of agency assassination records. The interview will be used as an opportunity to resolve any outstanding questions regarding the agency's search, including any follow-up tasks to be completed by the agency. The Review Board anticipates that these interviews will be conducted in January 1997.
  4. Submission of Final Agency Declaration of Compliance. By July 1, 1997, we

request that the FBI submit to the Review Board a final declaration certifying, under oath, the extent of its compliance with the provisions of the JFK Act as of that date and its proposals for promptly completing compliance with the JFK Act, including processing and transmittal to the National Archives of all responsive records, consistent with the provisions of the JFK Act (the "Final Declaration of Compliance"). This final declaration shall set forth all of the information initially set forth in the Initial Statement of Compliance and shall also supplement the Initial Statement of Compliance by detailing any further steps that were conducted by the agency in identifying, locating, and processing assassination records. The agencies' Final Declarations of Compliance will be included in our final report to Congress.

5. Compliance Depositions. Starting on or about August 1, 1997, the Review Board may conduct depositions, under oath, of the Agency Compliance Official along with any other agency officials with responsibility for complying with the JFK Act. The decision to take a compliance deposition of an agency will be made on a case by case basis, taking into account the importance of the agency to the work of the JFK Act and the sufficiency of the agency's efforts to account fully for its compliance with the JFK Act. In the event that the Review Board decides to commence a compliance deposition of an agency, the responsible agency designee(s) will be expected to testify under oath with respect to any and all issues relating to the agency's record search, including the scope of the search, the identity of files searched, the destruction of any relevant records, and any other matters set forth in the Final Declaration of Compliance. Any person obligated to appear for a deposition under oath shall be fully entitled to obtain legal representation.

We look forward to receiving your initial response, by December 13, that designates your Agency Compliance Official and includes your statement regarding your position with respect to the provisions outlined in this letter. To the extent that you have any questions or suggestions regarding the Compliance Program, please do not hesitate to contact our General Counsel, T. Jeremy Gunn, at (202) 724-0088.

Thank you for your cooperation with our work.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Louis J. Freeh  
November 29, 1996  
Page 6

David G. Marwell  
Executive Director

cc: Assassination Records Review Board

Howard M. Shapiro, Esq.  
General Counsel, FBI

John E. Collingwood  
Office of Public and Congressional Affairs, FBI

Carol Keeley  
JFK Task Force, FBI