

October 27, 1997

The Honorable Louis J. Freeh
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20530

Re: Completing the Review of JFK Assassination Records

Dear Director Freeh:

As you are aware, the Assassination Records Review Board has been mandated by Congress to oversee the declassification and transfer to the National Archives of all records related to the assassination of President Kennedy.

During the past three years we have received excellent cooperation from the Bureau. From our perspective, this is due in large part to the work of Carol L. Keeley, Chief of the Historical and Executive Review Unit, who has demonstrated a careful regard for the Bureau's interests while simultaneously working with us to ensure that the purposes of the JFK Act are achieved. She has proved to be a superb representative of the Bureau. We have also appreciated the strong message of support from John Collingwood, who advised us on September 25, 1997, of his full support for the project and his willingness to commit the necessary Bureau resources to complete the project.

Because the Review Board is now in the final twelve months of its statutory tenure, I thought it would be appropriate to advise you of our goals for the upcoming year. It is our wish to be able to state in our Final Report to the President and to Congress that the FBI has made all reasonable attempts to locate, review, and declassify all available records on the Kennedy assassination. We would like the Review Board to be in a position to assure the American people that the Bureau has been fully cooperative in this enormous and difficult task, and that the FBI no longer retains any "secret" files on the assassination. In addition, we are obligated to keep Congress informed, on a monthly basis, of the status of our work and of any difficulties that would interfere with our ability to achieve our objective.

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Although many important strides have been made to further our goals, we nevertheless perceive that the pace of review and declassification of Bureau records will need to be accelerated in order for us to succeed. We must keep in mind that the goal includes reviewing, processing, and transferring to the custody of the National Archives *all* identified assassination records by September 1, 1998. (We do not perceive that duplicate copies of such records need be transferred by September 1.) Many time-consuming difficulties inherent in this project have been overcome, and we perceive that the pace of review is accelerating. Nevertheless, we wanted to signal to you our concern that, unless the pace of review increases further, we may not be on target to satisfy what I hope to be our common objective.

It is our firm intention to complete our task within the congressionally mandated time limit. If the FBI is unable to review and process its records consistent with completion of this task, the Review Board will vote to release-in-full all relevant FBI records and mandate that custody be transferred to the National Archives in a timely way. We sincerely hope that it will not be necessary for the Board to make wholesale decisions on unreviewed records and we will be pleased to work with the Bureau to see that such a step is unnecessary. But we are prepared to make such decisions to the extent they are required to fulfill our own responsibilities. Although it is our perception that the FBI may wish to devote additional human resources to this project, we of course leave such decisions to the sound judgment of knowledgeable FBI officials.

We therefore strongly urge the Bureau to take all appropriate steps to complete its review of records in an orderly and systematic manner. To the extent that the Bureau is able to satisfy appropriate deadlines, there will be no need for us to resort to any unfortunate—but potentially necessary—measures to complete our own obligations to Congress, the President, and the American people.

If you would find it helpful, the Review Board members and I would be pleased to discuss these issues with you or others at the Bureau.

Sincerely,

T. Jeremy Gunn
Executive Director

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cc: Assassination Records Review Board
Ms. Carol L. Keeley
Mr. John Collingwood