

December 6, 1996

BY COURIER

The Honorable Sheila E. Widnall
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330-1670

Re: Department of the Air Force Compliance with the JFK Assassination Records
Collection Act, 44 U.S.C. § 2107

Dear Secretary Widnall:

Since 1994, the Assassination Records Review Board ("Review Board") has been working with a number of Federal agencies, including the Department of the Air Force, to locate and publicly release 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 primarily with Ms. Jessica Spencer of the Air Force's Information Management Office (SAF/AAI) and greatly appreciate the cooperation we have received.

The purpose of this letter is to request the Air Force'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 have been accomplished to the greatest reasonable extent. We want to assure the American people that the United States Government has identified, located, and released 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

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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 18, 1996, the Department of the Air Force 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"). If necessary, the Department of the Air Force may designate additional persons with knowledge of the measures that have been undertaken to locate assassination records.

We also request that, by December 18, the Air Force 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 6, 1997, an initial written statement of the agency's compliance with the JFK Act ("Statement of Compliance"), setting forth the steps that the Department of the Air Force has taken to locate and process assassination records. The Review Board recognizes that many of the relevant federal agencies, including the Department of the Air Force, 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 Statement of Compliance, while it may include information previously reported to the Board, is to be the preliminary version of the agency's Final Declaration of Compliance to the American public of what it has done to locate records relating to the assassination. (See item number 4 below). This Statement of Compliance shall include, to the fullest reasonable extent, the following information:

- a. A complete description of all steps that the Department of the Air Force 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 its 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 Department of the Air Force to locate assassination records.

We appreciate that in May 1996 Colonel Robert E. Carr (Chief, Infrastructure Division, Directorate of Mission Systems DCS/Communications and Information) sent the Review Board a memorandum advising it that a thorough search had been accomplished at Air Force installations and that, aside from an operations log from Andrews Air Force Base, there appeared to be no other assassination-related records at Air Force installations. (Copy of memorandum attached.) This memorandum is a useful starting point for the Air Force's Statement of Compliance, but additional details are still required. (In addition to needing further information about what records were searched and how this was done, it is unclear from Colonel Carr's memorandum whether any effort was made to search records from the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force and the Air Staff, including any records still under Air Force control at the Federal Records Center at Suitland, Maryland.)

- b. If any assassination-related records are known to have been destroyed, a specific explanation of the circumstances surrounding the destruction of such records.

- c. The status of remaining work that you can now identify that needs to be completed by the Department of the Air Force 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 date(s) for completion of these tasks.
3. Review Board Interview With Agency Compliance Official (or Officials). Shortly after the submission of the Department of the Air Force's written Statement of Compliance, we will 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 any Department of the Air Force assassination records. The interview will be used as an opportunity to resolve any outstanding questions regarding the Air Force's search, including any follow-up tasks to be completed. The Review Board anticipates that these interviews will be conducted in January and February 1997.
4. Submission of Final Agency Declaration of Compliance. By July 1, 1997, the Department of the Air Force should expect to complete the process of identification, location, and declassification of its assassination records at which time it should submit to the Review Board a final declaration certifying, under oath, its compliance 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 to identify and locate assassination records. The Final Declarations of Compliance from the Air Force and other agencies will be included in our final report to Congress.
5. Compliance Depositions. Starting on or about August 1, 1997, the Review Board, pursuant to its statutory authority, 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

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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 18, 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,

David G. Marwell
Executive Director

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Sheila C. Cheston, General Counsel, USAF
Mr. Stewart F. Aly, Associate Deputy General Counsel, DOD
Ms. Jessica Spencer, Information Management Specialist, SAF/AAI