

November 27, 1996

BY COURIER

The Honorable Patrick F. Kennedy  
Assistant Secretary of State for Administration  
United States Department of State  
Room 6330  
2101 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

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

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

Since 1994, the Assassination Records Review Board ("Review Board") has been working with a number of Federal agencies, including the United States Department of State, to locate 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 with Nina J. Noring, the Department of State's JFK Act Liaison, and Frank M. Machak and Margaret P. Grafeld, Director and Acting Director, respectively, for the Office of Freedom of Information, Privacy and Classification Review, as the principal representatives of the Department of State in connection with its compliance with the JFK Act. These individuals, particularly Ms. Noring, have been very cooperative and helpful in working with the Review Board. In addition, the Department's embassies abroad have been helpful in assisting the Review Board's efforts to obtain assassination-related records from foreign governments.

The purpose of this letter is to request your agency's cooperation in assisting the Review Board to discharge its responsibility of assuring Congress and the American people that the goals of the JFK Act have been accomplished to the greatest 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. 102-625, Part 1, 102d Cong. 2d Sess. (1992) ("The Federal Government's failure to release official materials has

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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. sec. 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 9, 1996, the Department of State designate an Agency Compliance Official who ultimately will be responsible for ensuring that the Department of State 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. Although the Review Board assumes that Ms. Noring will serve in this position, we nevertheless await the Department of State’s formal confirmation. If necessary, the Department of State may designate additional persons with knowledge of the measures that have been undertaken to locate assassination records.

We also request that by December 9 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 6, 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 Department of State, 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 agency's comprehensive and final report to the American public of what it has done to locate records relating to the assassination. This 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.

We appreciate that the Department of State has previously provided the Review Board with written status reports as to its processing of assassination records. *See, e.g.*, July 7, 1994 Assassination Records Survey completed by the Department of State; March 29, 1995 Letter from Frank M. Machak to Sheryl L. Walter; and August 18, 1995 Letter from Margaret P. Grafeld to David G. Marwell (attached hereto). This information has been helpful and should be included in the Department's Statement of Compliance. Since the Department's letter reports were necessarily interim in nature and made at particular times in this process, we ask that the Department also include in the Statement of Compliance all pertinent updated information so that the Statement will constitute the Department of State's comprehensive explanation

to the public of what it did to identify and process assassination records under the JFK Act. Particular attention should be paid to providing a detailed explanation of the extent and scope of the Department of State's searches for assassination-related records.

- b. To the extent that any assassination-related records have been destroyed by the Department of State or State Department official, a full and 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 State 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 agency's written Statement of Compliance, we ask that the Agency Compliance Official (as well as any persons who helped prepare the Department of State'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 search, including any follow-up tasks to be completed by the Department of State. 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, the Department of State 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 by the agency in identifying and locating assassination records. The agencies' Final Declarations of

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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 9, 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

Enclosures

cc: Assassination Records Review Board  
Michael J. Matheson, Legal Advisor  
Nina J. Noring, JFK Act Liaison  
Margaret P. Grafeld, Acting Director

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Office of Freedom of Information, Privacy and  
Classification Review