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PUBLIC INTEREST DECLASSIFICATION BOARD

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Carmen A. Medina
Ryan Montoya
Alissa Starzak

May 7, 2025

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House of Representatives
H-209, The Capitol
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

This letter serves as the Public Interest Declassification Board's (PIDB) annual report under the provisions of section 706(e) of the Public Interest Declassification Act of 2000, as amended (P.L. 106-567).

On behalf of the members of the PIDB, I am pleased to provide you with a report on the Board's activities and operations in calendar year 2024.

Over the course of last year, the Board held a series of meetings, including one public meeting, on federal pilot initiatives, and exploring commercial capabilities in applying artificial intelligence and machine learning tools to classification and declassification processes.

The Board's activities are discussed in more detail in the attached report.

Respectfully,

Michael D. Thomas
Executive Secretary

cc. The Honorable John Thune
The Honorable Hakeem S. Jeffries
The Honorable Charles Schumer



Annual Report to Congress for Calendar year 2024

May 7, 2025

Overview of the Public Interest Declassification Board

The [Public Interest Declassification Board](#) (PIDB) was established by Congress in 2000, via the Public Interest Declassification Act to serve in an advisory role to the Executive Branch, with the official mandate of promoting the fullest possible public access to a thorough, accurate, and reliable documentary record of significant U.S. national security decisions and activities. The PIDB advises on the identification, collection, and declassification of records of extraordinary public interest, including recommendations for the President on the declassification of specific records as directed by congressional request. The PIDB also advises the President and other executive branch officials on policies deriving from the issuance by the President of Executive Orders regarding the classification and declassification of national security information.

The Director of the [Information Security Oversight Office \(ISOO\)](#) serves as the executive secretary of the PIDB, and directs ISOO staff in their support for the Board.

Public Events & Engagement

PIDB Public Meeting, June 24, 2024

On June 24, the Board held a public meeting at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC. The meeting featured presentations on projects for FOIA processing at the Departments of State and Defense. Representatives from the Department of State (State) outlined the challenges with the large volume of diplomatic cables eligible for declassification review that render human review unsustainable.

In 2022, State piloted their implementation of AI augmented cables declassification review, followed by their first public release of records reviewed via this process in late 2023. As of June 2024, 450,000 cables had been reviewed in this process. Building on the success of the first pilot, State launched a second pilot for FOIA review, the *360 FOIA Matching Tool*, which is currently in the testing and implementation phase.

The Department of Defense (DoD) presentation focused on addressing the necessity to modernize the department's classified information management declassification program. Representatives from the Applied Research Laboratory for Intelligence and Security provided an overview of the system engineering model for automatic declassification review.

The DoD is also engaging with other federal agencies, including State, the Department of Energy (DOE), and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), on its projects. The speakers and board members stressed the need for high-level government attention, and a coordinated

approach, to projects like these, which seek to use technology to modernize classification [The event was live streamed, and an online recording is available.](#)

PIDB Member Academic Conference Participation, April 19, 2024

On April 19, PIDB Board Members Carter Burwell and Carmen Medina participated in the 2nd Annual Conference in Honor of Robert Jervis held in New York City. “The Dark State? Government Secrecy and American Democracy,” was presented by the Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies and the Institute of Global Politics. This event grew out of the PIDB’s 2023 conference at the L.B.J. Presidential Library and the University of Texas at Austin.

Burwell moderated a panel on the “Law of Secrecy,” in which participants discussed the state of secrecy in American government, including issues associated with executive branch primacy, legislative deference and dysfunction, and judicial acquiescence and abdication in areas such as the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the state secrets privilege.

Medina participated in a panel on “The Use and Misuse of Artificial Intelligence to Manage Dangerous Information.” The panel agreed that artificial intelligence (AI) had a role in a future declassification regime, but that training an AI model on the subtleties of declassification decisions would not be straightforward. Panelists agreed that a private-public partnership was essential for progress, and that both the government and the American public would have to accept a certain error rate given the volume of documents and the vagaries of classification decisions (also known as “good enough for government work”). Even if a system achieved a “six sigma” level of accuracy, potentially thousands of declassification errors could occur each year.

It was suggested that a novel application of AI might be to use an AI engine to rationalize classification and declassification guidelines. One panelist noted that she had heard anecdotally that individuals were using AI to fill in the gaps in redacted documents. Finally, panelists expressed concern that an AI declassification engine could be hacked by adversaries but that this threat was unavoidable in the use of digital technology. [An online recording of the event is available.](#)

Executive Sessions

The PIDB held eight virtual executive session meetings during the calendar year. The PIDB focused its executive sessions on learning about agency efforts to use technology to modernize the classification and declassification processes. Notable executive sessions of the Board in 2024 included:

Executive Session, May 15, 2024

On May 15, the PIDB hosted representatives from the DOE who provided a briefing on their Advanced Computer Tools to Identify Classified Information application, which uses artificial intelligence tools to aid derivative classifiers in reviewing and identifying information classified under the Atomic Energy Act.

Executive Session, July 17, 2024

On July 17, the PIDB hosted representatives from the Air Force, who provided a presentation on their automation project, Battering Ram, which converts security classification guides and policy guidance into a machine-readable format. Battering Ram can automatically detect inconsistencies between the guides and policy, generate rulesets, and evidence for decisions. Battering Ram will allow for data sharing among the Department of Defense branches and with foreign allies.

Executive Session, October 16, 2024

On October 16, the PIDB hosted representatives from the NGA who provided a briefing on their consolidated security classification guide, known as CoNGA, consolidated 65 individual guides into one guide that staff can access online and is searchable. This modernization project eliminated redundancies and resolved conflicting guidance. CoNGA enables timely updates to classification guidance and more accurate classification determinations by agency personnel. Consolidating guides into a machine-readable format will set the stage for future work with implementing automation for classification and declassification functions.

Executive Session, December 18, 2024

On December 18, the PIDB hosted representatives from the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA) Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena (UAP) records project. NARA has established Record Group 615 UAP Records Collection which will consist of the digital records transferred to NARA.

Online Publications

Over the past year, the PIDB posted 12 entries on its public-facing blog, [Transforming Classification](#). Each entry invited feedback and public comments. The posts highlighted PIDB activities, including notices of events and agendas for executive sessions.

2023 Annual Report

The PIDB submitted its Annual Report to Congress on March 7, 2024, which detailed the work completed during calendar year 2023. [The FY2023 annual report is available via PIDB's public website.](#)

Board Departures and Appointments

As specified in section 703(c) of the Act, the PIDB is composed of nine members: five presidential appointees and four congressional appointees (Speaker of the House, House Minority Leader, Senate Majority Leader, and Senate Minority Leader). The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 amended section 703(c) and a member whose term has expired may continue to serve until a successor has been appointed and sworn in, for up to one year after the date of term expiration. In January 2024, the two Presidential positions were filled by Andrew Byrnes and David Hickton. At the end of the year, Chair Mary DeRosa, Andrew Byrnes, and David Hickton resigned their positions on the Board.