

LETTER *to the* PRESIDENT

November 27, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The Public Interest Declassification Board (“the Board”) is pleased to submit *Transforming the Security Classification System*, the study conducted pursuant to your Implementing Memorandum (December 29, 2009) for Executive Order 13526, “Classified National Security Information.” The report sets forth and explains key recommendations that flowed from the study we undertook in cooperation with the National Security Advisor to design a fundamental transformation of the security classification system.

We believe the current classification and declassification systems are outdated and incapable of dealing adequately with the large volumes of classified information generated in an era of digital communications and information systems. Overcoming entrenched practices that no longer serve the purpose of protecting our national security will prove difficult. We believe it will require a White House-led steering committee to drive reform, led by a chair that is carefully selected and appointed with specific authorities that you grant.

The Government’s management of classified information must match the realities and demands in the 21st century. We hope our recommendations serve as a guide to lead the proposed committee in developing a comprehensive new policy and implementation plan.

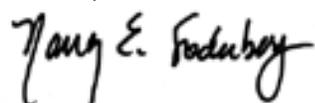
The Board has consulted extensively with experts from the Government openness advocacy community, civil society and transparency groups, archival researchers, and technologists and solicited opinions from distinguished civil servants, Executive department and agency officials, and the Congress. Our efforts were designed to gain a broad perspective on issues confronting the classification system and led to the fourteen core recommendations in this report. Sharing the recommendations with agencies has elicited a number of negative comments; there is little recognition among Government practitioners that there is a fundamental problem. Clearly, it will require a Presidential mandate to energize and direct agencies to work together to reform the classification system.

The classification system exists to protect national security, but its outdated design and implementation often hinders that mission. The system is compromised by over-classification and, not coincidentally, by increasing instances of unauthorized disclosures. This undermines the credibility of the classification system, blurs the focus on what truly requires protection, and fails to serve the public interest. Notwithstanding the best efforts of information security professionals, the current system is outmoded and unsustainable; transformation is not simply advisable but imperative.

Currently, classification and declassification do not facilitate rapid and agile information sharing required to fully support today’s national security mission. It became clear to the Board that only by exploiting current and developing new technologies and applying them in an improved policy framework will the national security community be capable of managing the growing volume of electronic information created in the digital age.

If implemented, our proposed recommendations will increase efficiency, reduce costs, improve transparency and, ultimately, help restore confidence in the classification and declassification system.

Sincerely,



Nancy E. Soderberg
Chair