



July 20, 2022

Senator Ron Wyden
Dirksen Senate Office Building
SD-221
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Jerry Moran
Dirksen Senate Office Building
SD-551
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Wyden and Senator Moran:

The National Coalition for History (NCH) is a consortium of 43 organizations that advocates and educates on federal legislative and regulatory issues affecting historians, archivists, political scientists, documentary editors, teachers, students, and other stakeholders. Our members rely on the declassification, as soon as is practicable, of federal records to perform research. Without access to these records, we risk presenting an incomplete historical record and make it more difficult for the public to hold our leaders accountable.

Thank you for your recent letter to President Biden supporting an overhaul of Executive Order (EO) 13526 that regulates the U.S. government classification and declassification system. The EO has not been updated since 2009 and is woefully outdated to deal with the proliferation of classified materials.

While President Obama created the National Declassification Center to expedite declassification of records at the National Archives, chronic underfunding and NARA's lack of declassification authority has overwhelmed its capabilities. The problem is also exacerbated by over-classification on the front end when the records are created. Both problems, over-classification and declassification, must be dealt with in tandem to alleviate systemic logjams.

The pandemic has exacerbated declassification delays in the federal government, especially at the National Archives, who desperately need more resources both human experts and technological. While up-to-date technology is essential for streamlining review of classified information, improvements in guidelines are just as critical for reducing backlogs and over-classification. For example, under the present executive order, agencies can unilaterally exempt historical records from declassification. Such authority should be limited.

The Coalition strongly supports the initiatives you are taking to fix U.S. declassification policy. Our democratic institutions and national security depend on your success. Please let us know if the coalition and our members can be of any assistance in this effort.

Sincerely,

Executive Director

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