



PUBLIC INTEREST DECLASSIFICATION BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS
FOR CALENDAR YEAR

2025

**Annual Report to Congress for
Calendar Year 2025**

May 28, 2026

Public Interest Declassification Board
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Mark Angelson



PUBLIC INTEREST DECLASSIFICATION BOARD

VICE CHAIRS
Carter Burwell
Ezra Cohen

EXECUTIVE-SECRETARY
Michael D. Thomas
Director
Information Security Oversight Office

MEMBERS
Laura DeBonis
Valdez Demings
John W. McCarthy
Carmen Medina
Ryan Montoya
Alissa Starzak

May 28, 2026

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House of Representatives
H154, The Capitol
Washington D.C. 20515-6601

Dear Mr. Speaker:

This letter provides the Public Interest Declassification Board's (the Board) 2025 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 Board, I am pleased to provide you with an overview of their activities and operations for calendar year 2025.

Over the past year, the Board's work centered on evaluating opportunities for structural reform in the management of classified national security information, the advancement of AI-enabled declassification initiatives, and pursuit of the declassification and public release of historically significant classified records relating to the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001.

Efforts undertaken in 2025 also set the stage for expanded engagement with Congress in 2026, with the board fielding declassification review requests from both chambers based on outreach efforts taking place during the period reflected in the Board's annual report.

The enclosed report provides a detailed account of the Board's activities during calendar year 2025, which we respectfully submit for your consideration as part of the Board's ongoing service to Congress and the American public.

Respectfully,

Michael D. Thomas
Executive Secretary

ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS

Calendar year 2025 was a period of significant transition, with the Board welcoming five new members, including a new Chair, and updating its bylaws to streamline administrative processes and update its leadership structure. The Board transitioned to a monthly, in-person meeting cycle, with a focus on assessing and addressing overclassification and the need for greater standardization in the classified national security information system. The Board also made renewed investments in congressional outreach, pursuing the declassification of historically significant records. These investments laid the groundwork for a highly successful public meeting at the U.S. Capitol in January 2026, and resulted in multiple requests from Members of Congress for public interest declassification recommendations on specific records. The Board anticipates providing recommendations to the President, responsive to these requests, in calendar year 2026, consistent with the Board's statutory obligations.

Overview of the Public Interest Declassification Board

Established by the Congress in 2000 via the [Public Interest Declassification Act](#) (50 U.S.C. § 3355), the Board serves as an advisory body to the President, senior Executive Branch officials, and Congress on matters related to classification, declassification, and public access to historically valuable national security information. The Board's mandate is to promote the fullest possible public access to a thorough, accurate, and reliable documentary record of U.S. national security decisions and activities.

The Board advances this mission by reviewing and making recommendations to the President on congressional requests to declassify historically important records or to evaluate the propriety of existing classifications. It also provides briefings and analyses on systemic challenges within the classification and declassification system, including updates on interagency coordination undertaken through the [Information Security Oversight Office \(ISOO\)](#).

The Board routinely and substantively engages with Executive Branch agencies across the national security community, as well as with historians, researchers, leading universities, advocacy organizations, and other non-governmental stakeholders. These activities support congressional oversight, inform Executive Branch policymaking, and strengthen transparency while safeguarding national security.

As defined in section 703(c) of the Public Interest Declassification Act, the Board consists of nine members: five appointed by the President and four appointed by congressional leadership—Senate Majority Leader, Senate Minority Leader, Speaker of the House, and House Minority Leader. This structure ensures representation from both the Executive and Legislative Branches and promotes a balanced, bipartisan approach to the Board’s work. The Director of ISOO serves as the Executive Secretary of and oversees ISOO staff in their support for the Board.

Public Events and Outreach

October 2025 Public Meeting (Postponed)

The Board undertook extensive planning throughout 2025 for a public meeting to be held in the U.S. Capitol. Although originally planned for October 2025, the meeting was ultimately rescheduled for January 14, 2026, due to a federal government shutdown. The event was designed to highlight the need for greater transparency on 9/11-related records approaching their 25-year automatic declassification review deadline. This looming milestone has drawn increasing public attention and underscores the importance of ensuring that agencies are prepared to meet their declassification obligations. The Board recommends two historically significant sets of records for priority declassification:

- The 9/11 Commission’s President’s Daily Brief Summary, a 7,000-word synthesis of intelligence reporting on al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and Afghanistan in the three years preceding the attacks.
- The 9/11 Commission’s collection of seventeen interview transcripts with the President and Vice President, senior national security officials, and subject-matter experts, created to support the Commission’s statutory mandate to investigate the attacks and recommend corrective measures.

The Board has consistently championed the review and release of these records, emphasizing that their continued classification more than two decades after the attacks, contrary to the stated wishes of the 9/11 Commission itself, raises serious concerns about transparency, accountability, and public trust. At the same time, the Board views the challenges in achieving public accessibility for these records as emblematic of broader systemic deficiencies—underscoring the need for modernization and adequate resourcing in the declassification process.

Council on Foreign Relations -- Overcoming a Culture of Secrecy: Can the United States Kick its National Security Over-Classification Habit?

On November 19, 2025, Board members [participated in a Council on Foreign Relations \(CFR\) panel](#) to elevate a national dialogue on the longstanding problem of overclassification and its impact on U.S. national security. During the CFR event, the Board Chair, Vice Chairs, and former member, Jennifer Simms, were joined by the Director of ISOO for a conversation on how chronic overclassification impedes the rapid and effective sharing of intelligence—an increasingly urgent concern amid evolving threats from China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.

Their discussion emphasized the bipartisan consensus that national security information policies and technical infrastructure require modernization to ensure critical insights can be disseminated at speed and scale. Current Board members highlighted ongoing work examining Artificial Intelligence-enabled (AI) declassification pilots, the need for structural reform across government, and the importance of strengthening public trust through transparency.

The CFR event underscored the continuing importance of informed, nonpartisan guidance in improving the nation’s classification and declassification system and reinforced the Board’s view that sustained attention on systemic modernization and effective information-sharing remains essential to supporting sound decision-making and protecting national security.

Executive Sessions

The Board began the year by onboarding three members in January and completing onboarding of the remaining two members in May 2025, bringing all five members—Mark Angelson (Chair), John W. McCarthy, Ryan Montoya, Valdez “Val” Butler Demings, and reappointed member Carter Burwell—into full service. Over the course of calendar year 2025, the Board convened eight Executive Sessions, exceeding its statutory requirement to meet at least four times annually (once per quarter). The Board did not meet in August due to a scheduled recess, nor in October or November due to the federal government shutdown from October 1 through November 12.

Via these sessions, the Board examined policy issues, established its ongoing priorities, and information needs related to classification, declassification, and matters of significant public interest. The Board also solicited briefings and engaged with subject-matter experts from departments and agencies involved in national security information policy to deepen its understanding of implementation challenges and opportunities for reform across the information lifecycle. These sessions enabled the Board to remain closely informed on the state of agency efforts, technological advancements, and ongoing pain points within the classification and declassification system, strengthening the Board’s ability to advise Congress and the President on meaningful reform. Notable executive sessions included:

January 15, 2025 – On January 15, the Board held its first meeting of the year, virtually, to discuss goals and set priorities for the new calendar year. The Board affirmed overclassification and standardization as areas of focus for the coming year, and an intent to establish a monthly cadence of in-person executive sessions.

April 10, 2025 – On April 10, the Board unanimously agreed to update and amend its existing Bylaws and elected two Vice Chairs, Carter Burwell and Ezra Cohen. Members hosted representatives from the All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO), the Records and Declassification Division of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) for a briefing on the Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena (UAPs) records project. Their briefing revealed the importance of a multi-agency effort, to identify, attribute, and mitigate anything in U.S. airspace that should not be there. The presentation included a discussion on the need for resources, tools, and a secure federated system/platform to review these records.

May 21, 2025 – On May 21, the Board hosted representatives from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), the Applied Research Laboratory for Intelligence and Security (ARLIS), and The Society Library. NGA provided a briefing on the current status of its Consolidated NGA “CoNGA” Security Classification Guide (SCG). Through meta-tagging and partnerships with internal stakeholders on automation efforts, NGA has been able to improve the search functionality and resources available on the Security Management Resource Tool (SMaRT), which translates the data in the CoNGA SCG to an online portal accessible by the NGA workforce. ARLIS provided a briefing on their current testing of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AI/ML) capabilities on real data to determine the appropriate models to assist in declassification modernization with a goal of applying these systems to information reviews, such as FOIA, prepublication review, and foreign disclosure. The Society Library provided a briefing about the importance of digitization of government record collections in collaboration with Internet Archive to improve and expand the release of government information.

July 16, 2025 – On July 16, the Board received a briefing on declassification automation from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) at their headquarters in Langley, Virginia. The CIA provided demonstrations of several tools used to expedite and improve aspects of the agency’s declassification and public release workflow.

Plans and Priorities

In 2026, the Board will continue to advance a strategic agenda focused on strengthening public access to historically significant federal records and promoting a balanced system that protects national security while enabling appropriate access to records. Building on the momentum of its work in 2025, the Board's priorities for the coming year reflect both longstanding statutory responsibilities and the evolving needs of a modern information environment. The Board's efforts are shaped by the approaching 25-year declassification deadlines for key 9/11-related records, the increasing complexity of digital-era information management, and the shared priority among Congress and the Executive Branch to improve transparency consistent with national security requirements.

Across these areas, the Board aims to illuminate systemic challenges, promote practical and achievable reforms, and support more efficient, accountable processes for managing classified and restricted materials. Its work is grounded in collaboration—with Executive Branch agencies, Congress, academic institutions, industry partners, and subject-matter experts—and informed by The Board's unique statutory role as an independent advisor on classification and declassification policy.

The priorities outlined below represent the Board's principal areas of focus for 2026 and reflect its commitment to advancing transparency, strengthening interagency coordination, and ensuring that the federal government is equipped to meet its obligations to the public in an era of rapidly expanding information demands.

- **Advocacy for 9/11 Transparency**

The rescheduled Public Meeting on 9/11-related records, to be held on January 14, 2026, anticipates remarks from Senator Cornyn, Senator Wyden, Senator Slotkin, Representative Luna, and Brett Eagleson, along with an overview of still-classified 9/11 records and potential reforms. The meeting will serve as a major early-year engagement highlighting systemic issues in reviewing and releasing 9/11-related materials.

- **Charting a Path to Wider Declassification Reform**

Drawing on historically important record sets to identify systemic challenges and develop targeted, practical solutions. This work informs the Board's efforts to refine and advance recommendations that modernize policy, strengthen review processes, and improve timely public access to records of enduring public interest.

- **Systemic Modernization of the National Security Classification System**

Collaborating with Executive Branch partners, subject-matter experts, industry leaders,

and academic institutions to advance a modern, centralized records-management architecture for classified and restricted materials. These efforts help build a shared cross-agency understanding of modernization priorities and support more efficient, consistent declassification review.

- **Continued Support of Congressional and Presidential Requests**

The Board stands ready to support Congress and the President on classification and declassification matters, consistent with its statutory mandate. Its work during calendar year 2025 reflects sustained engagement with Executive Branch agencies across the national security community, as well as collaboration with leading non-governmental experts. Additionally, heightened emphasis on congressional engagement has resulted in declassification review requests from both chambers of Congress.

- **Expanding Resources**

The Board can best support Congress and the Executive Branch when it is adequately resourced to meet its statutory responsibilities. As the federal government continues to prioritize workforce realignment and fiscal discipline, the Board remains committed to efficient operations while sustaining the expertise necessary for its independent advisory function. Stable, dedicated funding would strengthen the Board's ability to advance transparency in a manner consistent with national security requirements.