

Opening Statement of Gabrielle M. Dudley
Nominated to Serve on the Civil Rights Cold Case Records Collection Act Review Board
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
January 13, 2022

Good morning Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee this morning as you consider my nomination to serve as a member of the Civil Rights Cold Cases Records Review Board. I am deeply honored by President Biden's nomination of me to this Board, as I am humbled that the work of this Board could mean closure and justice for so many families and move our country towards healing from the atrocities of the civil rights era.

The aims of the Civil Rights Cold Cases Records Review Board align with my professional ethos and yet are also deeply personal. I was raised by Maple and George Dudley in Bessemer, Alabama, a small suburb of Birmingham. As an Alabamian and Black daughter of the South, I grew up with constant reminders of the struggles of the civil rights era and knowledge that unsolved civil rights cases existed. My upbringing and love for my country's history, albeit sometimes painful, led me to pursue a professional career as an archivist. I feel a special connection and obligation towards the work of the Board and, if confirmed, will work with the other members of the Board to appropriately ensure public disclosure of civil rights cold case records.

The Board is responsible for "consider[ing] and render[ing] decisions on (a) whether a record constitutes a civil rights cold case record; and (b) whether a civil rights cold case record or particular information within a record qualifies for postponement of disclosure under the [Civil Rights Cold Case Records Collection] Act." I am trained as a professional archivist and have been working in the field and with civil rights era collections for over a decade. In my work, I have arranged and described records, handled private and confidential archival materials, provided reference assistance to a variety of researchers using archives, and used primary source material to engage audiences in classrooms, exhibitions, and public spaces. I understand the balance of providing access to critical records while protecting the privacy of witnesses and other parties which might be revealed within the records. I embody and employ the principles of the Code of Ethics for Archivists put forth by the Society of American Archivists and strive to exercise ethical and professional judgements in all my work. I recognize the cultural value of these records and realize how full access to them can spur both transformation and change. If confirmed, I am committed to immediately working with fellow members of the Board and government entities to develop a schedule for reviewing the records and determining which can be publicly disclosed now and which require postponement.

I consider my role as an educator to be equally as important to the work of the Review Board as my role as archivist. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the teacher and students from Hightstown High School who originated the bill that would later become the Civil Rights Cold Case Records Collection Act. I am encouraged by the potential for young people, scholars, journalists, artists, and others to access records that could lead to further scholarship and understanding of the civil rights area and potentially even to solving some of the cases. In my professional work, I coach college faculty, K-12 teachers, and other instructors on using primary sources like cold case records in their teaching and advocate for students to use primary sources to contextualize history in order to understand our country in the present day. I am cognizant of the impact that decisions of this Board could have on young scholars learning about key movements within our country's history.

The work of this Board is timely and will have a tremendous cultural and social impact on the ways in which the civil rights era is taught and discussed for generations to come. I am deeply honored to speak today and thank the Committee for considering my nomination. I look forward to answering your questions.