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February 18, 2004

The Honorable W. Ralph Basham
Director
U.S. Secret Service
950 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20223

Dear Mr. Basham:

I am writing regarding a recent *Washington Post* article about the Secret Service's delay in informing the United States Postal Service about the discovery of a ricin-contaminated letter addressed to the White House.¹ A delay in informing the Postal Service about the presence of a potentially deadly toxin such as ricin in the United States mail could expose Postal Service employees as well as Postal Service customers to serious risks, as we saw with the anthrax attacks in 2001. I am writing to learn more about the decision to withhold this information and about any new procedures the Secret Service has put in place to avoid such delays in the future.

According to the *Washington Post*, although the Secret Service waited six days to notify the Postal Service about this ricin-containing letter, the delay "did not threaten public health ... because the poison was deemed low-grade."² However, it could have been dangerous, and any delay in informing the Postal Service could have resulted in injury. A Postal Service spokesman was quoted as saying that mail officials "would have liked to have known earlier."³

In order to understand how the decision was made not to tell the Postal Service about the ricin, and to understand what procedures are in place to avoid a delay in the future, I would like you to answer the following questions:

1. Why did the Secret Service delay telling the Postal Service about the ricin in the letter for six days?

¹ *FBI Told of 2003 Ricin Letter after 6 Days*, *Washington Post* (Feb. 5, 2003).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

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2. Did the Secret Service ever make a determination that postal workers were not at risk from the ricin? If so, when was that determination made and on the basis of what evidence?
3. Did the Secret Service consult any experts in making its decision not to inform the Postal Service about the ricin for six days? Were the experts provided with the envelope itself to make a determination about the possibility that the substance could have been dispersed? Please provide me with the names of those experts.
4. What procedures has the Secret Service put in place to ensure that in the future such a delay will not occur?

I would like a response to this letter by March 2, 2004. If you or your staff have any questions, please call Sarah Despres at (202) 225-5420.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member