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(U//FOUO) Protection of Legacy Tokens

Mass shootings have been occurring with alarming frequency over the past few decades in the United States (U.S.). Offenders of these attacks often leave behind items to claim credit for the attack and / or articulate the motivation behind it. BAU-1 refers to these items as "legacy tokens." The review of these items is critical to identifying the motive; as well as, the choice of timing and location of the attack.

BAU-1, or the FBI's Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC), is the national-level, multi-agency, multi-disciplinary task force focused on the prevention of terrorism and targeted violence (e.g. mass shootings) through operational support, training and research. In this unique capacity, BAU-1 provides threat assessment and threat management support to federal, state, and local law enforcement partners, working on targeted violence prevention.

Ultimately, prevention of and response to these attacks are critical steps which will continue, but BAU-1 opines that responsible authorities need to take every measure possible to limit the capability of future offenders that are considering, planning, and preparing to commit a mass shooting. On this basis, BAU-1 strongly discourages the public dissemination of any legacy tokens for the following reasons:

1. Public access to legacy tokens will contribute to future attacks. Future attackers will immerse themselves in and study these materials for inspiration and tactics. BAU-1 knows from research and operational experience that attackers study the attackers that preceded them. Infamy and notoriety are major motivators for many attackers and are often pursued by attempting to be more successful than previous attackers and / or mimicking their actions, behavior, or dress. Additionally, the dispersion of legacy tokens through the media will only further the infamous and notorious goals of the offender, ironically commissioned by the very entities tasked with thwarting these attacks.
2. Reasonably, the request often proffered by those seeking the release of the materials revolves around the public's need to understand what led to such tragic events. Yet, legacy tokens seldom provide the answers or comfort sought by the public and surviving victims. Offender's words are often misleading, biased, or lacking insight. Very often legacy tokens do not provide a cogent or coherent rendering of the facts leading up to an attack. Ultimately, offenders commit these attacks for multiple, varied reasons, many of which the offenders themselves do not fully grasp or comprehend. Additionally, there will often be a tendency to dismiss the attacker as mentally ill, given the style and lack of coherence often seen in these writings. This will further permeate the false narrative that the majority of attackers are mentally ill. BAU-1's research has shown this to not be the case.
3. Public access to legacy tokens will also facilitate false narratives and inaccurate information. For personal gain, self-professed "experts" will proffer their perspectives on the motivations behind the attack. Many of these pontificators will be inexperienced or untrained, and therefore inaccurate in their assessment, further confusing or potentially inflaming the public. This also may lead to unintended consequences for the segment of the population more vulnerable or open to conspiracy theories, which will undoubtedly abound.

There is existing precedent for not releasing legacy token materials to the public, most notably the decision to destroy the "Basement Tapes" produced by the offenders of the Columbine High School attack [hereafter "Columbine"]. While not the first school shooting in U.S. history, Columbine is often noted and revered by offenders as the most consequential attack. In the vast majority of mass attacks, and more specifically school-based attacks, Columbine and the offenders in that case have been researched and placed on a pedestal. Notwithstanding the

publics lack of access to the "Basement Tapes," there is a notoriety and intense interest in the "Basement Tapes" that permeates online today.

Public release of legacy tokens from all mass shootings, but school shootings in particular, will likely spark incredibly intense interest and study by potential offenders who are considering a school-based attack. For all the reasons listed above, release of legacy tokens such as this would endanger school security across the country.

Experts agree that as a society we must do everything we can to prevent all mass shootings, including school shootings, from happening in the future. A clear step we can take is limiting the availability of legacy tokens for ideation, study, and inspiration by those considering an attack.

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