

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DANIEL K. AKAKA

Security Clearance Reform: Setting a Course for Sustainability

Hearing

Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Aloha and good morning. Just over five years ago, in 2005, this Subcommittee held its first hearing on the Department of Defense's (DoD) personnel security clearance program after the Government Accountability Office (GAO) designated the program as being at high risk for waste, fraud, abuse, or mismanagement. Today, we hold our seventh hearing on security clearance issues, and I am pleased to say that we have seen tremendous progress throughout the course of our oversight work.

Delays in the clearance process began over 20 years ago. By the time this issue was added to the GAO high-risk list, DoD industry clearances took over 300 days on average to complete. Ongoing delays led to a backlog of hundreds-of-thousands of investigations and adjudications.

Today, as we will hear from our panelists, the backlogs are gone and timeliness is within the goals laid out in the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act – less than 60 days total for most investigations and adjudications.

The other key aspect of the high-risk designation is investigation quality. Until recently, GAO noted that incomplete investigation files were routinely sent to adjudicators, who would either send them back to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), or adjudicate them with incomplete information. Unfortunately, there was no way to monitor or measure investigation quality.

I am pleased that earlier this year, in response to a letter from Senator Voinovich and me, GAO and the executive branch worked together to identify metrics that would be consistent with GAO's recommendations on quality.

Overall, I have been pleased with the work of the Performance Accountability Council (PAC) to address the high-risk designation and to modernize and streamline the security clearance process. We will continue to rely on its work to sustain the progress and momentum for reform in the future.

Despite the progress, however, there are remaining issues and challenges that I believe are crucial to successfully reforming the clearance process. The information technology in place, especially at the OPM, must be modernized to support 21st century capabilities – as is common across the private sector and other government agencies. I look forward to hearing more about this and OPM's enterprise architecture modernization project.

Additionally, it seems reciprocity may still be an issue between certain agencies. The intent of several Executive Orders on this issue is clear: agencies need to work together to accept clearances from other agencies. This will allow national security positions to be filled more quickly with right people in the right jobs. Reciprocity for employment suitability may need to be addressed as well.

Senator Voinovich and I introduced legislation to institutionalize these reforms to the security clearance process. Our bill, the Security Clearance Modernization and Reporting Act (S. 2834), calls for strategic planning, expanded timeliness reporting, and a more formal establishment of the PAC.

I look forward to hearing the testimony from all of our witnesses here today. I also look forward to GAO's next high-risk list update in the coming months to see where this issue stands. Regardless of whether it remains on the list, I think that we can all agree that there has been outstanding progress.

The progress is in no small part a testament to strong Congressional oversight, which is key to making the Federal Government more efficient, more effective, and more responsive. I have been proud to work with Senator Voinovich on these issues over the years, and I will continue our oversight efforts in the future.

As evidenced by our distinguished panel here today, this particular issue has enjoyed high-level leadership attention, and I hope your work will serve as a model for addressing other high-risk areas and management challenges.

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