

STATEMENT OF

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before the

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Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce,
and the District of Columbia
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on

Security Clearance Reform: The Way Forward

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Chairman Akaka and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the improved timeliness of the security clearance process and the current reform efforts.

As outlined in Executive Order 13381 dated June 28, 2005, President George W. Bush directed that “agency functions relating to determining eligibility for access to classified national security information shall be appropriately uniform, centralized, efficient, effective, timely, and reciprocal.” OPM Director Linda Springer takes that direction very seriously and has included in OPM’s Strategic and Operational Plan specific goals to ensure we accomplish the goals set by the President and by Congress.

Background

OPM's mission is to ensure the Federal Government has an effective civilian workforce. To accomplish this mission, OPM provides background investigation products and services to agencies so they can make security clearance or suitability decisions for civilian, military, and contractor hires. OPM conducts various levels of investigations based on the type of position and work to be conducted. The actual background investigation can range from a minimum level investigation for positions that require Confidential or Secret clearances to extensive field investigations for Top Secret clearances.

The division responsible for conducting background investigations at OPM is the Federal Investigative Services Division (FISD) which supports over 100 Federal agencies and

their security offices across the country and around the world. With a vast network of field investigators and our automated processing system, FISD has sufficient capacity to handle the government's high volume demand for security clearance investigations. Last fiscal year, OPM conducted over 2 million investigations of varying types, including 850,000 national security investigations.

Since May 17, 2007, when I last spoke before your Subcommittee, the agency has improved the overall timeliness of the security clearance process. Not only has OPM met the goals outlined by Congress in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, the agency actually has exceeded those goals and substantially reduced the inventory of pending investigations.

Status of the security clearance and investigation process

In November 2005, the joint OMB-OPM Performance Improvement Plan was provided to Congress. It addressed four critical areas of the investigation and security clearance process: workload projections, timeliness and quality of agency submissions of investigations, investigations timeliness, and adjudications timeliness.

Workload projections: To ensure OPM has the resources necessary to meet the agencies' investigation needs, agency workload projections must be accurate. Over time, these estimates have improved which in turn has ensured OPM's resources are adequate to meet the Government's security clearance requirements.

Timeliness and quality of agency submissions of investigations: Critical to the efficiency of the process is the timely and accurate submission of an individual's required information to OPM. The Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP), a web based system, allows applicants to submit their information electronically which has improved both processing timeliness and quality. In the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2008, 86 percent of submissions for initial security investigations were made through e-QIP. In addition, all industry submissions for the Department of Defense are requested electronically.

In March 2008, submissions for initial security investigations through e-QIP averaged 14 days while hardcopy submissions averaged 27 days. This continues to be an improvement over the 35 to 55 calendar days reported in November 2005. In addition, the rejection rate for submissions is 8 percent and is on track to meet the performance goal of less than 5 percent by the end of the year.

Investigations Timeliness: The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 requires 80 percent of the background investigations for initial security clearances be completed within an average of 90 days. OPM is exceeding this statutory goal. The following chart shows OPM's investigations processing timeliness for initial clearances that were initiated in FY 2007 and the first quarter of FY 2008.

Type:		FY 07	FY 08 Qtr 1
All Initial Clearances	Total Initiated	583,866	148,944
	80% average	67 days	60 days
	85% average	72 days	64 days
	90% average	78 days	70 days
Top Secret Level	Total Initiated	80,373	20,127
	80% average	92 days	84 days
	85% average	97 days	88 days
	90% average	102 days	93 days
Secret/Confidential Level	Total Initiated	503,493	128,817
	80% average	63 days	56 days
	85% average	68 days	61 days
	90% average	75 days	66 days

As a result of OPM's increased investigation staffing of over 9,300 Federal and contractor employees, there is no longer a backlog of initial clearance investigations due to insufficient manpower resources. Maintaining this staffing level has resulted in the substantial decrease in the time it takes to complete all types of background checks processed by OPM. In October 2006, over 98,000 pending initial clearance investigations were over 180 days in process. As of May 10, 2008, only 3,728 initial clearance investigations were pending over 180 days in process.

Another factor which contributes to OPM's timeliness improvements includes the agency's ability to receive third-party information in a timelier manner. OPM has worked closely with a number of Federal, State, and local record agencies so that records are provided to OPM more rapidly. Also, our ability to work with the international community and other government agencies allows OPM to complete required international coverage. In 2007, we sent 360 agents abroad and closed more than 24,000 international leads for new employee clearances or required periodic reinvestigations of current Federal employees and contractors.

While improving the timeliness of investigations, we have retained the quality of those investigations. The quality control processes we have in place ensure that the investigations we conduct meet the national investigative standards and the needs of the adjudication community.

Adjudication Timeliness: In addition to monitoring the timeliness of the investigations process, we are tracking the time required for agencies to adjudicate the completed investigations and record their adjudication actions in our record system. In order to speed up this process, OPM is working with agencies to electronically transmit completed investigations to the adjudications facility. OPM is also working to link agencies' computer systems to OPM's database so they can update any new adjudication actions electronically.

In May 2007, I reported that OPM was testing the electronic transmission system with agencies in October 2007. Based on the success of the Department of Army pilot, we began using the system in August 2007. Currently, almost 190,000 investigations have been sent to Army for adjudication action, making the entire process between OPM and Army virtually paperless. In addition, we have transmitted almost 10,000 files electronically to the Department of Transportation and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). We are in the final stages of implementing this process with the Department of Energy and Department of Commerce.

Reform Initiatives

OPM is continuing to optimize investigations processing timeliness by maintaining adequate staffing, building partnerships with information suppliers, and expanding the use of information technology. We are also partnering with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Department of Defense on additional reforms to the overall security clearance process. On February 5, 2008, President Bush issued a memorandum to the heads of the Executive Departments and Agencies reaffirming his support in reforming the personnel security program across Government and asking the joint reform team for its reform plans. On April 30, 2008, the team sent a report to President Bush outlining the reforms it plans to pursue. The plan challenges traditional lifecycle processes and proposes the use of enhanced business processes for a more efficient Government-wide system.

This concludes my remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.