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**Statement of Chairman Daniel K. Akaka
“Security Clearance Reform: Moving Forward on Modernization”
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,
the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

September 15, 2009

This hearing of the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia is our sixth hearing on reforming the security clearance process, which has been on the Government Accountability Office’s High-Risk List since 2005. Since we began this line of hearings, much progress has been made in laying the groundwork for reform. Now is the time to move forward with modernizing the security clearance process in the federal government.

When this issue was originally placed on the High-Risk List, it was designated as a problem with the Department of Defense clearance process. However through our oversight, it has become very clear that this problem must be looked at through a government-wide lens and in conjunction with suitability screening.

The last administration, with the support of dedicated career civil servants on the front lines of this issue, worked hard to reduce processing times for security clearances. The backlog of security clearance determinations has all but vanished, but the investigations still rely on outdated, paper-based processes.

We must use this opportunity to make fundamental changes to the process to ensure that we do not experience the same problems in the future. Modernization also will lead to more efficient operations and will help with another key priority of mine: streamlining the federal hiring process and making it more user-friendly.

It is also time to further examine the quality of clearance investigations and adjudications. This means creating and implementing meaningful metrics that can be audited so that we know the system is working. The security of our Nation depends on ensuring that security clearance decisions are based on thorough, modern, risk-based determinations.

With metrics in place, it will become clear that one of the biggest barriers to modernizing the clearance system is reinventing and modernizing the information technology infrastructure at the Office of Personnel Management, the Department of Defense, and within the intelligence community. I have been concerned for years about the outdated systems in use throughout the clearance process. Some of these systems date back over twenty years.

Every change in administration brings inevitable delays, as new leaders are put into place. Some of the reforms outlined by the Joint Reform Team, made up of government stakeholders involved in issuing clearances and suitability determinations, are behind schedule.

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While progress has been made, with timeliness greatly improved and backlogs reduced, meeting the Intelligence Reform Act's milestones alone should not be the ultimate goal. We must work to modernize the clearance process in order to remove it from the High-Risk List as soon as possible. This will require the buy in of all stakeholders, a willingness to collaborate, and the knowledge and skills that the reform team has brought to the table.

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