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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

October 2, 2014

The Honorable Beth Cobert
Deputy Director for Management
The Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Deputy Director Cobert:

We are writing to you in your capacities as Deputy Director for Management and as Chair of the inter-agency Suitability and Security Clearance Performance Accountability Council (PAC) to ask about steps you will take to ensure the quality and timeliness of background investigations in light of the decision of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) not to extend the options on its contracts with U.S. Investigations Services, Inc. (USIS).

Background investigations are critical to national security. Federal officials rely on these investigations to determine who are trustworthy to have access to classified information, who have the character and credentials to work in federal service or as a federal contractor, and who should have access to sensitive federal facilities or information systems.

As you know, we and many of our colleagues in Congress have had growing concerns about the role of USIS in background investigations, due to fraud allegations that have been brought against the company by the Department of Justice, as well as recent revelations about a cyber breach of the company's systems.

Recently, OPM has relied on only three contractors to perform background investigation fieldwork, with roughly half of the work being contracted to USIS. Because OPM performs over 90 percent of background investigations for the entire federal government, the removal of any one of OPM's contractors could have a significant governmentwide impact on processing of background investigations.

The redistribution of work previously done by USIS undoubtedly will be a major management challenge. Therefore, we would appreciate an update in writing, as well as a briefing for Committee staff, on the following, by October 16, 2014:

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1. What roles will the Office of Management and Budget and the PAC play in working with OPM to ensure that quality standards are fully met as workloads surge for OPM's own investigators and those of OPM's other contractors?
2. What will be the impact on timeliness of reviews as work is transitioned from USIS elsewhere? What will be your role in working with OPM and other agencies to prioritize reviews whose completion is most urgent?
3. What role will OMB play in assessing whether OPM has established an appropriate balance between contractor and federal employees for background investigation work, and for determining whether OPM has met OMB guidance related to the performance of inherently governmental or mission-critical work?

We appreciate your attention to these important questions, and we are committed to working with you to address these challenges. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

With warmest personal regards, we are

Sincerely yours,



Thomas R. Carper
Chairman



Tom A. Coburn, M.D.
Ranking Member