

# SECURITY CLEARANCE REFORM

INCREASING EFFICIENCY TO MEET GOVERNMENT NEEDS

The U.S. national security apparatus depends on timely and accurate investigation and distribution of security clearances to protect sensitive information, develop critical technologies, and maintain government operations. In recent years, the federal government has struggled to process new security clearances and conduct pending periodic reinvestigations. With backlogs reaching 750,000 in early 2018 and some defense contractors reportedly waiting 534 days for their employees' security clearances to be processed, the Government Accountability Office went so far as to elevate the issue to its "High Risk" list citing the immediate need for reform. Though improvements in the last two years have reduced the average wait time for a Top Secret clearance to 146 days, delays of up to 18 months are still common within the Intelligence Community.

## IMPACT

Investigation and adjudication delays have undermined the ability of industry to recruit and retain highly skilled talent, have imposed significant programmatic and overhead costs, and have had a detrimental impact on program execution. The pronounced effects on federal employees and government contractors are especially concerning, particularly those workers that support military, intelligence, and homeland security missions. Such impacts include:

- › An increase in contractor costs, which drives up the end user acquisition price.
- › Individuals who are unable to work on special access programs.
- › Manpower deficiencies that force contractors to no-bid proposals, limiting profits and decreasing jobs in the various support industries and trades.
- › Contractors who face penalties for underperforming on existing contracts.
- › Prospective employees who must find work in other sectors due to significant delays in start dates.
- › Delays in the development of critical technology necessary for the security of our nation and its warfighters.

## RECENT ACTION

The Trusted Workforce 2.0 Initiative, introduced during the Trump Administration, has made efforts to overhaul and modernize the security clearance and vetting system for the first time since World War II. Improvements include reduction to one personnel vetting model, three background investigation tiers, and five vetting scenarios.

President Trump also issued an executive order that transferred the security clearance program from the Office of Personnel Management to the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA), which falls under the jurisdiction of the Defense Department. That office is now charged with adjudicating roughly 95 percent of the background investigations for the federal government.

Congress added several other reforms to the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act, including setting new security clearance processing milestones, replacing periodic reinvestigations with continuous vetting, and calling for reciprocity and portability across the government.

## NEXT STEPS

As of January 2021, the security clearance backlog has been reduced significantly to a sustainable level of approximately 213,000. The DCSA has seen a 55 percent improvement in the speed with which Secret clearances are issued and a 60 percent improvement for Top Secret clearances. Reciprocity of clearances between organizations, particularly within the Intelligence Communities, continue to experience delays of up to 18 months. The executive branch is expected to implement Trusted Workforce 2.0 in 2022, as well as ensure that the regulatory implementation meets the expectations of Congress.



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