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STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT,
THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
SECURITY CLEARANCE REFORM: MOVING FORWARD ON MODERNIZATION
NOVEMBER 16, 2010

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today. It is my privilege to testify in my role as Chairman of the Suitability and Security Clearance Performance Accountability Council (PAC) and to discuss the progress of the Administration's ongoing security clearance reform efforts.

Since I last appeared before you in September of 2009, this Administration has made critical advances in reforming the security clearance process. While there is still work to be done, individuals seeking to work for the Federal government now face a substantially different clearance experience than they did just a few years ago. Today, I look forward to sharing our accomplishments and discussing the steps necessary to sustain our progress moving forward.

Background and Progress

For many years, the backlog of security clearances caused tremendous problems and significant expense for the Federal government. In 1994, a Joint Security Commission report noted that substantial delays in processing security clearances led to unnecessary costs because workers were unable to perform their jobs while waiting for a clearance. In light of these results, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) placed security clearances on its high-risk list in 2005. Even as recently as October 2006, the backlog of pending clearance investigations over 180 days old stood at almost 100,000 cases.

Today, however, much has changed. The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA), signed into law in 2004, challenged the Federal government to address longstanding coordination problems that unnecessarily affected the timeliness and quality of security clearances. As a result of actions taken to meet the objectives of IRTPA, the speed of the average security clearance has increased dramatically. IRTPA required all agencies to complete 90 percent of their security clearances in an average of 60 days. At the time IRTPA was enacted, the government-wide average was 205 days. By December 2009, 90 percent of the government's clearances were completed within the IRTPA-required timeframe of 60 days. We have consistently met the IRTPA target since that date. Today, 90 percent of security clearance determinations are completed within 53 days, a 74 percent reduction from the 2004 level. Moreover, the decades-old backlog of investigations is gone.

These impressive results were made possible by the skills and dedication of the staff at the agencies representing the security and suitability communities, and through your leadership and persistent focus on these issues. Now we must ensure that our progress is sustained in the

future. The Strategic Framework document submitted to the Committee in February established the path forward. We have now turned to the important task of implementing the plan, seeking to make the resulting efficiency gains permanent and routine.

Executing the Plan

Our February Strategic Framework identified numerous reforms that drive efficiencies in each phase of our improved clearance process, including: validate need; eApplication; automated records checks, eAdjudicate; enhanced subject interview; expandable focused investigation; and continuous evaluation/periodic investigations. Today, I would like to emphasize our progress in several critical areas within the larger plan: the alignment of suitability and security processes and policies; improving and tracking outcomes in reciprocity and quality; and driving new information technology solutions to advance timeliness and quality goals.

- Policy Alignment. We are aligning suitability and security policies and processes to limit redundancies in our investigative and adjudicative processes. To achieve this, we are modifying the regulatory and investigative standards as well as the information collection forms that underlie our clearance operations. For example, in March 2010, we published a revised Standard Form 86 that will capture the information necessary to enable more cost-effective security investigations.
- Reciprocity. We are working to improve reciprocity through initiatives such as enhanced sharing of relevant investigatory data among Federal agencies and robust performance metrics for tracking reciprocity outcomes. For example, the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Central Verification System and the Department of

Defense's (DoD) Joint Personnel Adjudication System are now integrated through a single interface, allowing agencies to view previous security, suitability, and credentialing decisions as well as investigatory information when they are deciding whether to grant reciprocity for a previous clearance.

- Quality. We are improving clearance quality by increasing access to investigatory information, clarifying policies and procedures, enhancing training, and measuring results. DoD, for instance, has developed an information technology solution called Rapid Assessment of Incomplete Security Evaluations (RAISE) that allows the Department to evaluate and track investigative quality in ways that were not previously possible. Similarly, OPM has created a feedback process that allows customer agencies to raise quality concerns with investigative products. To ensure that our approach on quality is most effective, the impact of these and other advances must be fully measured. In May 2010, we, in partnership with the GAO, reported to you a proposed set of quality metrics, which we will continue to refine and deploy in the short-term.
- Technology Advances. We are using enhanced technology to improve timeliness and reduce the number of unnecessary questions or the possibility of receiving incomplete forms. We have made important advances in converting paper-based application processes with automated solutions such as eQIP. Notably, over 98% of clearance application submissions to OPM are now completed electronically.

Moving Forward

Accordingly, this reform process has already achieved many successes in the areas of policy alignment, reciprocity, quality, and technology. That said, much work still remains to be done. Currently, we are making progress on the establishment of a new, five-tier framework for investigations that will enable greater reciprocity of clearances among tiers of equal or lower risk level. We expect this new framework to be released early next calendar year. Next month, we plan to deploy the new Standard Form 86 in an electronic format. We will also continue to develop an improved set of metrics to track reciprocity and quality.

Significant Progress Due to Clear Goals, Accountability, and Partnership

The security clearance effort also exemplifies the way we hope to reform government to enable programs to work faster, more efficiently, and serve the public better. Going forward, I hope that this initiative can be used as a model for broader government reform efforts.

Throughout this process, three key principles drove our reform effort: the adoption of clear goals, holding the proper executives accountable, and establishing solid partnerships with agencies, Congress, and the GAO.

- *Clear Goals.* IRTPA set goals regarding the processing of security clearance requests. Most significantly, agencies were asked to make a determination on at least 90 percent of all applications for clearances within an average of 60 days after investigations are initiated. Each month, the Administration delivers to your Committee a report on our progress relative to IRTPA's goals. As I have already described, government-wide progress over the past six years has been substantial.

- *Accountability.* We have held the appropriate agency leadership accountable for results. Since I joined the Administration, I have met regularly with the reform team’s senior leadership—who join me as witnesses—as well as with their principal advisors who drive the day-to-day effort. The Administration has also used our Priority Goal effort to hold officials at OPM and DoD—which investigates and adjudicates the largest number of security clearances—responsible for their respective deliverables. For example, Stan Sims, DoD’s Priority Goal Leader for security clearance reform, has reported regularly on his progress toward ensuring that at least 90 percent of all DoD national security investigations are delivered electronically to its adjudication facilities by the end of 2010, a target DoD met in December 2009. Today, 95 percent of all investigative materials are delivered via eDelivery to DoD.
- *Partnership.* The backbone of the reform effort has been effective partnership. The PAC has helped foster collaboration among various Federal stakeholders, while the Joint Reform Team has provided technical leadership and monthly reports on implementation. The GAO has also offered insightful and important counsel. This Subcommittee has helpfully held us accountable to the goals set forth in the IRTPA.

Conclusion

We have made significant progress on improving the suitability and security clearance processes, although much work remains. This reform effort is extremely important to me personally, as well as a high priority for this Administration. I would like to take a moment to recognize the extraordinary staff of the PAC who have been instrumental in this effort—in

particular, my Vice-Chair Elizabeth McGrath from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Kathy Dillaman from the Office of Personnel Management, and John Fitzpatrick from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. With their assistance, as well as that of the agency leadership testifying with me, and with the continued support of this Subcommittee, I am confident we will continue to improve the timeliness, reciprocity, and quality of clearance decisions.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify.