

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DANIEL K. AKAKA

Security Clearance Reform: Sustaining Progress for the Future

Hearing

Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Aloha, I want to welcome our witnesses to today's hearing: *Security Clearance Reform: Sustaining Progress for the Future*.

In 2005, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) placed the personnel security clearance process on its High-Risk List due, in part, to a massive backlog of applications and insufficient quality standards. This is the Subcommittee's eighth hearing on the security clearance process since that time.

In addition to GAO's and the Subcommittee's oversight, the administration has placed long-term, high-level focus on reforming the process. I am pleased to say that last year, the security clearance process was removed from GAO's High-Risk List. The application backlog has been eliminated, and timeliness requirements in the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act have been met and exceeded. Today, initial investigations take an average of 44 days to complete, compared to a staggering 189 days in 2005.

Investigation quality improvements were another key aspect of removing the high-risk designation. In multiple reports, GAO had found that clearances were granted based on incomplete investigation files. Moreover, there was no way to evaluate the quality of security clearance determinations to make sure security threats were consistently weeded out. Lapses in quality posed a national security risk.

The Performance Accountability Council (PAC) has worked together to address all aspects of investigation and adjudication quality. The PAC has updated the security clearance application, improved interview techniques, and created quality metrics. Its members are working to standardize investigator training and to develop government-wide adjudication guidelines.

Despite considerable progress, challenges remain. Continued oversight and accountability are needed to continue progress and momentum in the future. Reciprocity continues to be an issue. In our 2010 hearing, I urged agencies to work together to accept clearances from other agencies. This allows critical national security positions to be filled with the right people more quickly.

Although progress has been made on this issue, establishing more uniform training, investigation, and suitability standards would increase trust between agencies and promote reciprocity. Additional information technology improvements also are needed to support information-sharing and case management. Without these investments, further improvements in timeliness and reciprocity will be difficult to achieve.

This will be my last hearing on the security clearance process before I retire. Congressional oversight and sustained focus by the Executive Branch have produced a more efficient and functional security clearance process. I am proud of what we have accomplished together and hope that our work will serve as a model to address other high-risk areas in the federal government.

I will continue to monitor this issue during my remaining time in the Senate, and I hope that future Members of this Subcommittee continue to focus on this critical issue. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how they plan to build on this legacy and ensure the continued success of the security clearance process.

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