



**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Scott Perry (R-PA)
Oversight and Management Efficiency Subcommittee**

“Immigration Benefits Vetting: Examining Critical Weaknesses in USCIS Systems”
March 16, 2017

Remarks as Prepared

Last month, this subcommittee held a hearing on the challenges faced by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in reigning in bureaucratic waste, inefficiency and mismanagement. In today’s heightened threat environment, DHS must have necessary systems in place to execute its mission – especially with regard to immigrant vetting.

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) plays an essential role in processing millions of applications each year for people requesting permanent or temporary entry into the United States. However, watchdogs repeatedly voice concerns about USCIS management of the critical information technology (IT) systems used to process these applications, and found instances of fraud in everything from asylum to immigrant investor applications.

Today’s hearing will focus on findings from the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on USCIS’s IT systems and the security risks from USCIS failure to manage these efforts effectively. For example, in the last 6 months alone, the OIG reported that:

- USCIS should halt its plans to process naturalization applications through its primary system, the Electronic Immigration System (ELIS), due to security concerns related to inadequate applicant background checks
- USCIS erroneously issued about 20,000 Green Cards due to design and functionality problems with ELIS, and
- USCIS granted citizenship to at least 858 individuals who had been ordered deported or removed under another identity because their digital fingerprint records were unavailable in systems maintained by DHS and the FBI.

USCIS’s ineptitude inadvertently may have granted illegal aliens, criminals, or even terrorists citizenship or permanent residency - thereby putting American lives at risk.

But the problems don’t end there. In 2015, GAO reported that USCIS could not adequately detect fraud in asylum or immigrant investor applications due to deficiencies in the ELIS system. GAO also reported that delayed implementation of an initiative aimed at automating paper-based application processes, called the Transformation Program, posed problems for identifying fraud.

The GAO and OIG further found that USCIS cannot ensure that applicants are vetted adequately because of the problems with the Transformation Program and related system. In fact, GAO and the OIG collectively

made over 54 recommendations in 12 separate reports to address significant challenges implementing the Transformation Program. Unfortunately, after investing 11 years and about \$1.4 billion, USCIS has very little to show for its efforts. Taxpayers deserve more than a program that's a poster child for IT mismanagement.

Individually, any of these reports would be alarming; but together, they indicate systemic weaknesses in the way USCIS vets and processes immigrant applications. The risks to national security are breathtaking.

Perhaps equally concerning, however, is that USCIS - at times - has failed to take seriously these watchdog findings. In March 2016, Inspector General Roth wrote the following to the Director of USCIS with regard to the Transformation Program:

"I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to express my disappointment at the tone and substance of your office's response to the audit report, as well as audit staff's efforts throughout this project. This is our sixth review of a deeply troubled program which has, over its life, wasted hundreds of millions of dollars...USCIS has continually minimized the shortcomings of the program and resisted independent oversight...Non-concurrence of this nature [with our recommendations] does not appear rational, is contrary to Department policy on audit resolution...and suggests continued effort to promote disagreement for its own sake rather than collaboration towards the shared goal of promoting effectiveness and efficiency in Department operations."

Ineffective program management is one thing – and has a clear solution; but altogether more concerning is a culture resistant to oversight, particularly when it provides a path forward and recommendations for improvement. Ms. Scialabba, I hope I have your commitment today that USCIS is willing to work constructively with GAO, the OIG, and the Congress to correct longstanding deficiencies. Management malpractice is unacceptable, but especially when criminals and terrorists seek to exploit any vulnerability in our system. We're relying on USCIS to ensure these enemies aren't allowed into our country.

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