



One Hundred Eighteenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 14, 2023

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Throughout the United States, our maritime ports serve as the gateway to our national economy by connecting American consumers, manufacturers, and farmers to the global marketplace. Ports, waterways, and vessels move billions of dollars in cargo annually, and an attack against our nation's maritime transportation system (MTS) could have serious consequences.

Maritime workers, including longshoremen, mechanics, truck drivers, and merchant mariners, access secure areas of maritime ports each day while performing their jobs. The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) program is intended to help secure the MTS by providing a tamper-resistant biometric credential to these workers who require unescorted access to secure areas of facilities and vessels regulated under the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002 (MTSA). Since the TWIC program was established in 2007, DHS has enrolled over seven million transportation workers.¹

TWIC is a key part of DHS's layered security strategy to protect the transportation system and cargo. However, we have concerns about the implementation of the TWIC program.

Government watchdogs have reported on program challenges, including internal control weaknesses in 2011 and gaps in Coast Guard oversight in 2018. Additionally, TSA testified before the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security Committee in May 2023, that approximately 40 percent of TWIC enrollments take up to 30 to 60 days to adjudicate, and the DHS Inspector General has previously found that TSA has taken up to 140 days to reach a decision.² Furthermore, the Homeland Security Advisory Council Supply Chain Security Subcommittee found during a March 2023 port visit that TWIC cards were checked

¹ Briefing with the Transportation Security Administration (May 2, 2023) (on file with the Committee).

² Hearing on "Evaluating High-Risk Security Vulnerabilities At Our Nation's Ports", before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security (May 10, 2023); DHS OIG, *TWIC Background Checks are Not as Reliable as They Could Be*, OIG-16-128 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 1, 2016).

inconsistently, thus undermining the overall effectiveness of the TWIC program.³ Finally, industry groups have argued that TWIC is duplicative and overlapping with other government credentials. The burden of redundant background checks and duplicative fees can make it challenging and onerous for maritime workers to obtain the security credentials they need to do their jobs.

Based on these concerns, we ask that GAO conduct a review of the TWIC program that addresses the following questions:

1. What challenges – internal and external – contribute to the timeframes needed to adjudicate TWIC enrollments? What steps has TSA taken to address challenges within its organization? What steps could other federal entities take to expedite their inputs into the system and reduce external challenges for TSA?
2. A 2020 report published by the RAND Corporation found that “around half of TWIC applicants receive their TWIC cards within a week of application, and more than 99 percent of applicants receive initial adjudication of their applications in less than 30 days.”⁴ However, in their May 2023 testimony before our Subcommittee, TSA stated that around 40% of their applicants – considered “complex cases due to a potentially disqualifying factor” – took 30-60 days to have their applications adjudicated.⁵ What reasons have caused this longer timeline for TWIC applicants? Why are more TWIC applicants considered “complex cases” than before?
3. What steps has the U.S. Coast Guard taken since 2019 to improve its oversight of TWIC, and what have been the results?
4. To what extent does overlap, duplication, and fragmentation exist between TWIC and other federal transportation security credentialing programs such as the Hazardous Materials Endorsement (HME) Threat Assessment Program? What steps can TSA take to better harmonize its enrollment processes for the programs it administers – TWIC, HME, and TSA PreCheck – to eliminate redundancy and reduce operating costs?
5. Does TSA have the statutory authority to streamline the HME and TWIC processes so that applicants to one program could apply to the other at no additional cost? If so, what efforts has TSA taken to implement this change?
6. To what extent does the TWIC program collaborate with other federal credentialing programs to manage or avoid unnecessary duplication and fragmentation? To what extent does reciprocity exist between different federal credentialing programs?

³ Homeland Security Advisory Council, Supply Chain Security Subcommittee Final Report (Mar. 16, 2023). Available at <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/supply-chain-security-leadership-subcommittee-final-report>.

⁴ Heather J. Williams, Kristin Van Abel, David Metz, James V. Marrone, Edward W. Chan, Katherine Costello, Ryan Bauer, Devon Hill, Simon Veronneau, Joseph C. Chang, et al., the RAND Corporation, The Risk-Mitigation Value of the Transportation Worker Identification Credential: A Comprehensive Security Assessment of the TWIC Program (2020). https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3096.html.

⁵ Hearing on “Evaluating High-Risk Security Vulnerabilities At Our Nation’s Ports”, before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security (May 10, 2023).

7. Does TSA have the statutory authority to share enrollment processes with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) or any other federal agency? If so, what opportunities does TSA have to collaborate with CBP or other federal agencies that would improve the efficiency of and reduce operating costs for the TWIC program?
8. What are stakeholder views on areas for improvement in management of the TWIC program? What steps has TSA taken to address feedback from stakeholders regarding the TWIC program?

We appreciate your attention to this request. Should you have any questions about this request, please contact Homeland Security Majority Committee staff at (202) 226-8417.

Sincerely,



Mark E. Green, M.D.
Chairman
House Homeland Security Committee



Carlos A. Gimenez
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation and
Maritime Security