

STATEMENT OF  
CHARLES S. PHALEN, JR.  
DIRECTOR  
NATIONAL BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS BUREAU  
U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT  
before the  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS  
of  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Chairwoman Hartzler, Ranking Member Moulton, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am the Director of the National Background Investigations Bureau (NBIB) at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this Subcommittee today in order to update you about where NBIB is in terms of the transition of the Federal background investigation mission from OPM to the Department of Defense (DOD) improving our business processes and reducing the background investigations inventory.

Consistent with the President's Management Agenda and requirements from the FY18 National Defense Authorization Act, NBIB is working closely with its colleagues at the Defense Security Service (DSS) to transition responsibility for conducting background investigations for Department of Defense personnel to the Department of Defense (DoD). While the FY18 NDAA required the transfer of approximately 70 percent of NBIB's background investigation caseload, the Administration concluded that to achieve an efficient, effective, fiscally viable, and secure operation that meets the needs of the Executive Branch, it is necessary for the background investigation program to remain consolidated through a complete transfer of NBIB to DoD. When effectuated, such a transfer will bring together personnel security, vetting and counterintelligence missions into a single agency that will benefit our Federal and industry customers, as well as other stakeholders. NBIB stands ready to work with stakeholders and others as appropriate to accomplish this transition.

NBIB currently handles 95 percent of the background investigations within the Federal government. At its peak in April 2018, NBIB's inventory was at approximately 725,000 investigative products, including simple record checks, suitability and credentialing

investigations, and more labor-intensive national security investigations. Today our inventory is at 605,000 investigative products, a reduction of over 16 percent, and we continue to reduce the “backlog” by an average of 3,000 – 4,000 cases every week. Specifically, while the number of cases we receive have continued to increase over the past few months to approximately 55,000 per week, we not only managed to keep up but have surpassed our case closures at approximately 59,000 per week, enabling the inventory to decrease. We project we will continue to reduce inventory for the foreseeable future at an accelerating rate. It should also be noted that of the current 62,000 investigative products, 190,000 are for initial Secret clearances and 90,000 are for initial Top Secret investigations. As of November 5, 2018, 112,000 of those persons awaiting an initial Secret or Top Secret investigation, approximately 40 percent, have been granted interim clearances by their agencies while NBIB completes the overall investigation.

NBIB has taken a number of steps to achieve these improvements. We have expanded our investigative workforce to nearly 8,800 Federal investigators and contractors – an increase of over 51 percent since October 1, 2016. Overall, our field-investigative capacity has now reached a point higher than we had in 2014. We have also sought to better utilize resources as described below.

In FY2017, NBIB’s Strategy and Business Transformation office examined the entire background investigations process and identified ways to improve operations. Based on this examination, NBIB has worked to integrate information from trusted information providers – agencies and industry – into the process sooner to reduce duplication of efforts and to properly leverage this data. As a result, agents have been able to move on to other requirements more quickly. We have also improved fieldwork logistics by centralizing and prioritizing cases around locations where there are significant numbers of investigations, allowing NBIB to surge resources to a specific area and more efficiently and effectively complete a significant number of investigations. When more complex interviews and reports are required, we are making better use of technology to help collect that information. NBIB has increased digitization and automation of data, records, and information by proactively reaching out to record providers to negotiate direct connections and access to terminals. NBIB has also revised interagency agreements to more quickly facilitate downstream actions, such as case closing and adjudications.

NBIB has continued to build a mature relationship with its 100-plus Federal customers and stakeholders. Through the NBIB Stakeholder Group and the Customer Advisory Board, NBIB is able to hear and discuss concerns from those we serve and take action as appropriate. Going forward, NBIB stands ready to work with customers and stakeholders as appropriate to meet investigative needs, ensure transparency and effectiveness, and improve data collection and evaluation.

NBIB also participates in government-wide reform efforts in the security, suitability, and credentialing space. As part of the Performance Accountability Council (PAC), the interagency

group established pursuant to Executive Order 13467 to oversee reform of the Federal Government's background vetting program, NBIB works with other agencies to develop, implement, and continuously reevaluate and revise outcome-based metrics that measure the effectiveness of the vetting processes (e.g., security, investigative and adjudicative quality, cost, timeliness, reciprocity, customer service, and other performance characteristics). These efforts include:

- launching programs to continuously evaluate personnel with security clearances to determine whether these individuals continue to meet the requirements for eligibility, improving the level of review of cleared individuals while potentially reducing the need for a calendar-driven periodic reinvestigation;
- enhancing information sharing among state, local, and federal law enforcement entities when conducting background investigations; and
- assessing the quality of background investigations using a standard set of rules and an automated tool.

As we work towards the merger of our operations with the Defense Security Service, our mission of building and maintaining a trusted workforce and our efforts to realize process efficiencies, improve timeliness, and reduce our case inventory will continue. NBIB and DoD are using a process, known as a Tollgate, to facilitate regular discussions, develop milestones and deliverables, and mitigate challenges to assist a timely and successful transition. We remain committed to using innovation to meet our customer agencies' needs, leveraging their expertise as part of our decision-making processes, and remaining transparent and accountable to our stakeholders and Congress. We recognize that solutions to reduce the inventory and to maintain the strength of the background investigation program include people, resources, and technology, as well as partnerships with our stakeholder agencies and changes to the overall clearance investigation process.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.