

HOMELAND SECURITY AND JUSTICE

Called the greatest challenge facing the United States at the beginning of the 21st century, homeland security has fundamentally reshaped government priorities and altered numerous federal, state, and local programs. The September 11 attacks focused the nation's attention on both preventing and being better prepared to respond to acts of terrorism. In 2002 Congress created the Department of Homeland Security, consolidating 22 federal law enforcement, emergency preparedness, and other agencies. To achieve its mission, the department needs to be effectively linked to federal intelligence agencies, including the FBI, and law enforcement agencies at the state and local levels. Federal spending on law enforcement issues, including grants to improve capabilities of state and local agencies, has more than doubled over the past 10 years.

Our Work

The Homeland Security and Justice (HSJ) team assists Congress by researching and analyzing issues in both the homeland security and justice areas. We communicate our research results through briefings, written reports, congressional testimonies, and meetings with members of the Congress. We are in frequent contact with congressional staff, the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice, and other federal law enforcement agencies. In conducting our work, we use a variety of analytical techniques, including surveys, statistical analyses, modeling, structured interviews, file reviews, and direct observations. Through this work, HSJ supports Congress in its efforts to

- secure the nation's borders, transportation systems, and infrastructure against terrorists and weapons of mass destruction;
- increase emergency preparedness and capacity to respond to and recover from counterterrorism events; and
- strengthen the justice system to more effectively address crime, illegal drug use, and improve prison and judiciary operations.

In addition, HSJ helps Congress address broad national preparedness issues by

- focusing expertise on areas of emerging importance and providing the broader fiscal and social national context within which homeland security strategy is formulated.

KEY CONTACTS

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Accomplishments and Key Projects

Examples of our recent accomplishments include

- improving foreign counterintelligence, information coordination, and sharing of information relating to terrorism and other crimes with the Justice Department;
- providing an analytical framework and recommendations to close loopholes in the Brady Act involving firearm sales;
- documenting the variety of elections systems used across the nation during the 2000 presidential election and assisting Congress in its election reform deliberations;
- creating and implementing innovative Web-based collaboration and knowledge management tools to enable better marshalling of information among GAO teams; and
- partnering with experts external to GAO to address emerging issues, such as the use of digital satellite imagery to prepare for a wide range of threats, the creation and transformation of the Department of Homeland Security, and best business practices of the private sector and selected government entities on topics ranging from cargo security to continuity of operations.

Currently, we are also

- reviewing the extent to which civil liberties are protected in light of new federal initiatives to combat terrorism;
- assessing the capabilities of federal officials at border ports of entry to prevent unauthorized aliens from entering the United States;
- analyzing and testing the capabilities of screeners employed by the Transportation Security Administration to ensure that airline travel is secure;
- reviewing the nation's strategy to detect and deter money laundering;
- assessing how the federal government provides legal services to the poor;
- evaluating whether the method by which the judicial branch determines its need for judgeships is reasonable;
- assessing costs of homeland security to federal, state, local, and private sectors, particularly during periods of elevated terrorist threat alerts;
- assessing the implementation of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, particularly the Department of Homeland Security's compliance with legislative requirements;
- identifying models for government stimulus programs and calculating the need for changes to the terrorist threat alert system; and
- assessing (1) how well the various national strategies for homeland security meet the desirable characteristics of an effective national strategy and (2) the implementation of the strategies and their integration with other federal and nonfederal efforts.