



Highlights of [GAO-04-596](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight and the Courts, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Since September 11, 2001, information sharing between the FBI and state and local law enforcement officials has become increasingly important. Although the majority of information the FBI shares with state and local law enforcement officials is unclassified, these officials sometimes need access to classified information, which requires that they have a federal security clearance. This report describes (1) the FBI's process for granting security clearances to state and local law enforcement officials, (2) the extent to which the FBI has met its time frame goals for processing security clearance applications for state and local law enforcement officials and factors that could affect the timely processing of security clearance applications, and (3) efforts undertaken by the FBI to enhance its security clearance and information-sharing processes with state and local law enforcement officials.

SECURITY CLEARANCES

FBI has Enhanced its Process for State and Local Law Enforcement Officials

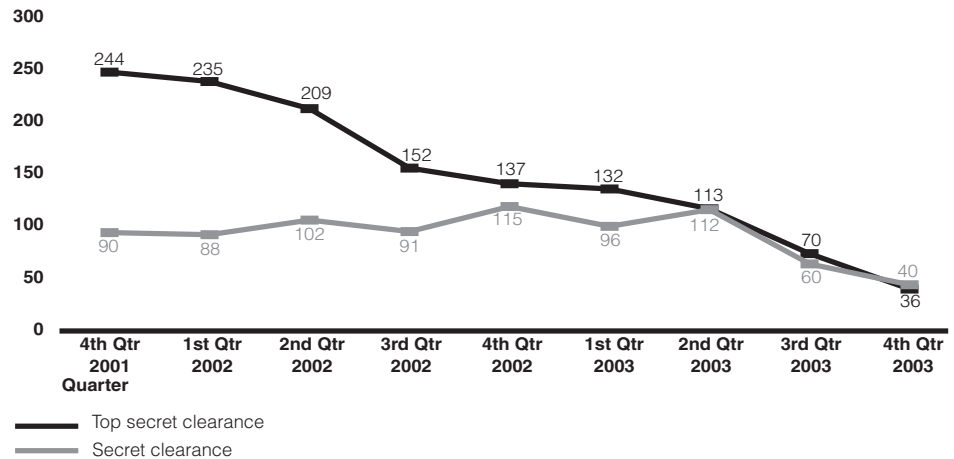
What GAO Found

Federal government-wide policies, as implemented by the FBI, apply to state and local officials seeking FBI-issued security clearances. The security clearance process for state and local officials involves six broad steps that consist of, among other things, an extensive background investigation and an adjudication based on federal government-wide criteria.

Since September 11, 2001, the FBI processed about 92 percent of top secret security clearance applications within its time frame goals of 6 to 9 months. About 26 percent of secret security clearance applications were processed within the FBI's time frame goals of 45 to 60 days, although substantial improvements have been made in the most recent quarters for which GAO has data. Time frames for completion of both top secret and secret applications have decreased since 2001. For either top secret or secret security clearance applications, processing time frames can vary depending on various factors, including the complexity of individual cases.

Average Number of Days for Completion of Security Clearance Applications

Average number of days to complete process



Source: GAO analysis of FBI data.

The FBI has enhanced its security clearance and information-sharing processes with state and local law enforcement agencies and officials. The FBI sent guidance on the security clearance process to its field staff and added staff to its headquarters unit responsible for processing state and local security clearance applications. To increase information sharing with state and local law enforcement officials, the FBI increased its number of Joint Terrorism Task Forces, which allow state and local law enforcement officials to engage in counterterrorism efforts directly with FBI officials, and has used a variety of bulletins, briefings, and database networks.

Officials from the Department of Justice and the FBI reviewed a draft of this report and generally concurred with GAO's findings.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-596.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Laurie Ekstrand at (202) 512-8777 or ekstrandl@gao.gov.