

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 and citizen behaviors. The September 11, 2001, 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, the FBI, and law enforcement agencies at the state and local levels. In addition, federal spending on law enforcement has increased significantly in recent years, particularly with regard to immigration and drug control, as well as in the area of emergency preparedness, including grants to improve the capabilities of state and local agencies.

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 Congress. We are in frequent contact with congressional staff, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Justice (DOJ), 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, infrastructure, and citizens against terrorists and weapons of mass destruction;
- increase emergency preparedness and capacity to respond to and recover from counterterrorism events and natural disasters;
- strengthen the justice system to more effectively address crime, illegal drug use, and improve prison and judiciary operations;
- improve the administration of our nation's election systems; and
- oversee homeland security and other DHS and DOJ related strategies, spending, and management.

KEY CONTACTS

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Accomplishments and Key Projects

Examples of our recent accomplishments include

- recommending modifications to the terrorist threat alert system;
- improving the targeting of oceangoing containers for inspection;
- enhancing the training and testing of screeners at airports and improving controls designed to secure restricted airport areas from unauthorized access;
- encouraging the Coast Guard to modify its port vulnerability assessment program, freeing up \$38 million for other port security efforts;
- improving emergency preparedness assessments in the national capital region;
- demonstrating that there is strong evidence that drug court programs reduce recidivism compared to other approaches, such as incarceration;
- strengthening federal legislation to prevent identity theft;
- helping develop national preparedness standards for homeland security; and
- assessing the implementation of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, particularly the Department of Homeland Security's compliance with legislative requirements.

Currently, we are also

- assessing the capabilities of federal officials to prevent unauthorized aliens from entering the United States, including the use of biometric and other technologies, commercial databases, and federal terrorist watch lists;
- analyzing the operations and staffing of passenger and baggage screeners at airports;
- reviewing the security of the U.S. passenger rail system;
- assessing efforts to improve federal emergency preparedness such as first responder grants, homeland security exercises, and national flood insurance;
- analyzing the impact of community oriented policing grants on crime rates;
- reviewing immigration benefit fraud and processing backlogs;
- reviewing the variety of elections systems used across the nation during the 2004 presidential election and identifying on-going challenges;
- examining U.S. Coast Guard budget and mission issues, including plans to replace the Deepwater fleet and the accuracy of performance measures for critical nonsecurity areas, such as search and rescue;
- examining the sharing of air and missile assets within DHS; and
- reviewing the sharing of homeland security information among federal agencies and between the federal, state, and private sectors.