

UNCLASSIFIED



Statement for the Record

**The Honorable Francis X. Taylor
Under Secretary, Office of Intelligence and Analysis
U.S. Department of Homeland Security**

Before the

**U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security**

Regarding

**“Crisis of Confidence: Preventing Terrorist Infiltration through U.S. Refugee
and Visa Programs”**

February 3, 2016

UNCLASSIFIED

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss DHS refugee, visa, and other admissions screening and vetting efforts. I am pleased to appear alongside my Department of Homeland Security (DHS) colleagues from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to discuss the holistic Department-wide approach to screening and vetting that we are moving towards in support of DHS's Unity of Effort.

For several years, DHS, together with our law enforcement and Intelligence Community colleagues, have leveraged a range of information and processes to carry out screening and vetting supporting our operational missions, to include preventing terrorism. Screening and vetting are key to refugee, visa, and other admissions adjudication processes. Every day, DHS, along with our interagency partners, vets millions of individuals traveling to, from, or within the United States; applying for citizenship and immigration benefits; or applying for credentials or other special accesses. Our screening and vetting efforts include biometric and biographic information collection, in-person interviews, detailed research and analysis, database vetting and bulk data screening, publicly-available information vetting (including social media), and identity verification. Director Rodriguez and Associate Director Kubiak have detailed many of these screening and vetting efforts in their statements.

We recognize that technological advances and the evolving nature of the threat environment require us to continuously re-evaluate and improve our screening and vetting processes. That is why we have efforts underway to evaluate how we might enhance the way we elicit information during in-person interviews and on our forms, identify new information and data relevant to vetting that is available to the U.S. Government, develop new methods to ingest data into our existing systems, and better calibrate information provided to adjudicators.

Additionally, Secretary Johnson asked me to convene a task force to examine our current use of social media expand its use for operational purposes across the Department, consistent with law. Social media is currently used for over 30 different operational or investigative purposes by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, ICE, Transportation Security Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Secret Service, the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, and other Components. The Task Force is examining the resource and technical challenges involved with more extensive use of social media, as well as its effectiveness as a component of the review process for applicants for various immigration benefits.

While I cannot discuss specifics regarding many aspects of our screening and vetting efforts in an open hearing, I will outline the broad steps DHS is taking to further improve our screening and vetting of admissions applicants:

UNCLASSIFIED

1. We are developing a framework and policies to further leverage information and intelligence available to the U.S. Government to inform our vetting programs and adjudication decisions.
2. We are continuously screening applicants against U.S. Government holdings at every stage of the vetting process to ensure that new information regarding applicants informs our admissions decisions.
3. We are continuously refining and enhancing our processes, capabilities, and systems, as we have since 9/11, to ensure that we leverage emerging technology and capabilities and adapt to a constantly evolving threat environment, while also protecting privacy and civil liberties.
4. We are working to resource needs and determine the appropriate DHS investment strategy needed to automate a process that enables bulk data screening and analysis in a manner that protects individual liberties.

To give an example of enhancements we are exploring, as part of our Social Media Task Force, the Office of Science and Technology and USCIS initiated a pilot to assist DHS with understanding the value of social media data sources with respect to vetting certain applications under the K-1 (fiancé(e)) Visa program and Syrian refugee processing. The pilot allows experienced USCIS immigration officers to access commercial state-of-the-art social media analytics capability to enhance our screening methodology. The pilot began in December of 2015 and will run through June 2016. This pilot is an example of how we are leveraging DHS's Unity of Effort and represents dedicated DHS collaboration with industry technology leaders. We will use this pilot as a template for future unified screening and vetting efforts. This pilot builds on previous efforts to enhance admissions application processing by leveraging social media, a matter Director Rodriguez addresses in his testimony.

Secretary Johnson has asked us to apply a unified Departmental approach to screening and vetting in support of our varied missions and as part of his broader priority of strengthening Departmental Unity of Effort. The efforts my colleagues and I have outlined are just a few steps we have taken in meeting this challenge, and we will continue to seek new ways to bring to bear our strength as a Department to solve the most pressing national security issues and fulfill our border security, immigration, travel security, and other homeland security missions.

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss this important matter. I look forward to answering your questions.

UNCLASSIFIED