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Washington, DC 20548

Comptroller General
of the United States

Accessible Version

June 2, 2022

The Honorable Robin Carnahan
Administrator
General Services Administration
1800 F Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20405

Priority Open Recommendations: General Services Administration

Dear Administrator Carnahan:

The purpose of this letter is to provide an update on the overall status of the General Services Administration's implementation of GAO's recommendations and to call your personal attention to areas where open recommendations should be given high priority.¹ In November 2021, we reported that on a government-wide basis, 76 percent of our recommendations made 4 years ago were implemented.² GSA's recommendation implementation rate was 97 percent. As of March 2022, GSA had 38 open recommendations. Fully implementing these open recommendations could improve agency operations.

Since our May 2021 letter, GSA has implemented one of our four open priority recommendations that we highlighted to your agency last year. GSA has developed and implemented a quality control plan for improving the quality of its data regarding the performance of commercial real estate brokers with whom GSA contracts.³

We ask your continued attention on the remaining priority recommendations. We are also adding two new recommendations related to GSA's prospectus process for leases and capital projects. This brings the total number of priority recommendations to five. (See the enclosure for the list of recommendations and actions needed to implement them.)

The five priority recommendations concern federal real property management. We have identified federal real property management as a high-risk issue since 2003 because of challenges related to managing the federal government's vast and diverse portfolio that costs billions of dollars annually to operate and maintain. Implementing these recommendations would improve GSA's management of real property, ensure greater accuracy in publicly available federal real property data, and strengthen GSA's ability to make sound decisions. Two

¹Priority recommendations are those that GAO believes warrant priority attention from heads of key departments or agencies. They are highlighted because upon implementation, they may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; improving congressional and/or executive branch decision-making on major issues; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or ensuring that programs comply with laws and that funds are legally spent, among other benefits. Since 2015, GAO has sent letters to selected agencies to highlight the importance of implementing priority recommendations.

²GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report: Fiscal Year 2021*, [GAO-22-4SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 15, 2021).

³GAO, *Federal Leasing: Quality Information and Metrics Would Allow GSA to Better Assess the Value of Its Broker Program*, [GAO-20-361](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 31, 2020).

priority recommendations, for example, could help GSA to address challenges that it identified with the prospectus process that may make it difficult to complete needed maintenance and repairs of federally-owned buildings.⁴

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In March 2021, we issued our biennial update to our [High-Risk List](#), which identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement or the need for transformation to address economy, efficiency, or effectiveness challenges.⁵ Our high-risk program has served to identify and help resolve serious weaknesses in areas that involve substantial resources and provide critical services to the public.

As noted above, one of our high-risk areas, [managing federal real property](#), centers directly on GSA. Other government-wide, high-risk areas also have direct implications for GSA and its operations. These include (1) [improving the management of IT acquisitions and operations](#), (2) [improving strategic human capital management](#), (3) [ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation](#), and (4) [government-wide personnel security clearance process](#). We urge your attention to the GSA and other government-wide, high-risk issues as they relate to GSA. Progress on high-risk issues has been possible through the concerted actions and efforts of Congress, Office of Management and Budget, and the leadership and staff in agencies, including within GSA. In March 2022 we issued a report on key practices to successfully address high-risk areas, which can be a helpful resource as your agency continues to make progress to address high-risk issues.⁶

Copies of this report are being sent to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget and appropriate congressional committees including the U.S. Senate Committees on Appropriations, Budget, Environment and Public Works, and Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs; and the U.S. House Committees on Appropriations, Budget, Oversight and Reform, and Transportation and Infrastructure. In addition, the report will be available on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

I appreciate GSA's continued commitment to these important issues. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the issues outlined in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me or David Trimble, Managing Director, Physical Infrastructure, at 202-512-2834 or trimbled@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Our teams will continue to coordinate with your staff on all of the 38 open recommendations, as well as those additional recommendations in the high-risk areas for which GSA has a leading role. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

⁴GSA is required by statute to submit a proposal (prospectus) for capital and lease projects with an estimated cost that exceeds a certain dollar threshold to its authorizing committees—the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. Prior to obligating funds for a project, GSA obtains approval of the prospectus from these committees.

⁵GAO, *High-Risk Series: Dedicated Leadership Needed to Address Limited Progress in Most High-Risk Areas*, [GAO-21-119SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2, 2021).

⁶GAO, *High-Risk Series: Key Practices to Successfully Address High-Risk Areas and Remove Them from the List*, [GAO-22-105184](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar 3, 2022).

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gene L. Dodaro". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" and a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
of the United States
Enclosure – 1

cc: Nina M. Albert, Commissioner, Public Buildings Service

Krystal Brumfield, Associate Administrator, Office of Government-wide Policy

David A. Shive, Chief Information Officer

The Honorable Shalanda Young, Director, Office of Management and Budget

Enclosure - Priority Open Recommendations to General Services Administration (GSA)

Federal Real Property Management

Federal Real Property: DHS and GSA Need to Strengthen the Management of DHS Headquarters Consolidation. GAO-14-648. Washington, D.C.: September 14, 2014.

Recommendations: The Secretary of Homeland Security and the Administrator of the General Services Administration should work jointly to take the following two actions:

- conduct the following assessments and use the results to inform updated Department of Homeland Security (DHS) headquarters consolidation plans:
 - a comprehensive needs assessment and gap analysis of current and needed capabilities that take into consideration changing conditions, and
 - an alternatives analysis that identifies the costs and benefits of leasing and construction alternatives for the remainder of the project and prioritizes options to account for funding instability;
- after revising the DHS headquarters consolidation plans, develop revised cost and schedule estimates for the remaining portions of the consolidation project that conform to GSA guidance and leading practices for cost and schedule estimation, including an independent evaluation of the estimates.

Actions needed: DHS and GSA agreed with the two recommendations. The Department of Homeland Security Headquarters Consolidation Accountability Act of 2015 required DHS to submit information to congressional committees regarding the current plan. The Act required that DHS, in coordination with GSA, provide information that was consistent with what we recommended, including a comprehensive needs assessment, a costs and benefits analysis, and updated cost and schedule estimates.⁷ In March 2022, DHS—with input from GSA—submitted its report to congressional committees in response to the Act. We are assessing the extent to which the report addresses our recommendations and could thereby enable sound decision-making related to DHS's ongoing headquarters consolidation.

Director: Christopher Currie, Homeland Security and Justice

Contact Information: curriec@gao.gov, (404) 679-1875

Acting Director: Catina Latham, Physical Infrastructure

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Federal Real Property: GSA Should Improve Accuracy, Completeness, and Usefulness of Public Data. GAO-20-135. Washington, D.C.: February 6, 2020.

Recommendation: The Administrator of GSA should coordinate with agencies to ensure that street address information in the public database is complete and correctly formatted.

Actions needed: GSA agreed with the recommendation. GSA has taken several actions along with the Federal Real Property Council (FRPC) to improve the quality of the street address information in the Federal Real Property Profile (FRPP) public database. First, GSA officials revised the data-reporting standards to favor longitude and latitude coordinates instead of street addresses. Second, GSA published a web-based geospatial validation tool to assist agencies in identifying and correcting erroneous geographic data elements. Third, the Federal Real Property Council Data Governance Working Group, which GSA supports, developed a phased action plan that commits member agencies to accurately report geographic data elements. In December 2021, GSA demonstrated the web-based geospatial validation tool. GSA should

⁷Pub. L. No. 114-150, 130 Stat. 366 (2016).

continue to implement and support the validation tool and the action plan, and we will continue to monitor their effectiveness as results become available in 2022. An effective validation tool and action plan would improve the accuracy of the street address information in the FRPP database.

Acting Director: Catina Latham, Physical Infrastructure

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Federal Real Property: GSA Should Fully Assess Its Prospectus Process and Communicate Results to Its Authorizing Committee. [GAO-22-104639](#). Washington, D.C.: January 21, 2022.

Recommendations: GSA officials should take the following two actions:

- The Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service should fully assess the prospectus process for leases and capital projects—including identifying, analyzing, and responding to risks associated with the process that may limit GSA’s ability to manage its assets portfolio—and should implement potential improvements to the process identified through the assessment. As part of this assessment, the Commissioner should solicit input from GSA’s authorizing committees about challenges and risks posed by the prospectus process.
- The Administrator of the General Services Administration should communicate to the agency’s authorizing committees the results of GSA’s assessment, including any proposed changes to the process that may require legislative action to implement.

Action needed: GSA agreed with the recommendations. GSA plans to address the recommendations by gathering input on ways to improve the prospectus process from its regional offices, the Office of Management and Budget, and its authorizing committees. GSA intends to incorporate this input into its full assessment of the process and identify potential improvements to it. Further, GSA plans to communicate the results of its assessment of the prospectus process, including any proposed changes to the process, to the Office of Management and Budget. Once the assessment is completed, GSA should provide information on the results of its assessment of the prospectus process and actions to implement any improvements that this assessment identifies to its authorizing committees. By fully assessing its prospectus process and communicating the results of the assessment to its authorizing committees, GSA can work with the committees to address any risks posed by the process, while also ensuring that any changes do not impede the committees’ oversight activities.

Acting Director: Catina Latham, Physical Infrastructure

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