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Washington, DC 20548

Comptroller General
of the United States

September 1, 2022

The Honorable Avril Haines
Director of National Intelligence
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20511

Priority Open Recommendations: Office of the Director of National Intelligence

Dear Director Haines:

The purpose of this letter is to provide the overall status of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's (ODNI) implementation of GAO's recommendations and to call your personal attention to areas in which GAO's open recommendations should be given high priority.¹ Our work on Intelligence Community (IC) oversight has generated numerous recommendations to help enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the IC, but we have seen little progress in the implementation of these recommendations.

In November 2021, we reported that on a government wide basis, 76 percent of our recommendations made 4 years ago were implemented.² We are not able to report on ODNI's rate of implementation for recommendations made 4 years ago because we did not issue any reports with recommendations to ODNI in fiscal year 2017. However, as of August 22, 2022, ODNI's rate of implementation for all of the recommendations we have made since 2011 was 27 percent—ODNI had 61 open recommendations out of the 90 recommendations we made since 2011.³

The classified enclosure to this letter identifies 19 priority recommendations, of which several are classified, that directly address challenges in key areas of IC management and have an effect on the IC's ability to accomplish its mission.⁴ By fully implementing these recommendations, ODNI could improve its ability to help ensure the IC best manages its

¹Priority open 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 operation, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a [high-risk](#) or duplication issue.

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

³In 2019 and 2021, we sent letters to ODNI summarizing open recommendations and requested updates on the status of these recommendations but as of August 2022 we had not receive feedback on the status of these recommendations or actions taken to address the open recommendations.

⁴Due to the classified nature of some of the recommendations, additional details on the priority recommendations in the four key areas noted in the letter can be found in a classified enclosure to this letter (enclosure 1). In addition, a complete list of all the priority recommendations, including the report details and contact information, can be found in a second classified enclosure to this letter (enclosure 2).

workforce and infrastructure in order to fulfill its mission of providing intelligence to decision makers, and could improve the IC's ability to efficiently and effectively perform mission activities. We ask for your continued attention to these 19 priority recommendations, which fall into the following four areas:

- **Intelligence Enterprise Management.** We have five priority recommendations in this area related to IC enterprise business functions, systems, and organizations.
- **Infrastructure and Facilities.** We have two priority recommendations in this area related to planning and management of IC infrastructure and facility projects.
- **Workforce Management.** We have seven priority recommendations in this area related to IC human capital and talent management.
- **Personnel Vetting.** We have five priority recommendations in this area related to the personnel vetting and security clearance process.

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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

One of our high-risk areas—government-wide personnel security clearance process—is relevant to the IC. While we have identified some progress in addressing this high-risk issue, we currently have five priority recommendations directed to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence focused on personnel vetting. These recommendations are focused on ensuring the timely completion of investigations and adjudications and developing performance measures for assessing the quality of all phases of the personnel security clearance process. We urge your attention to this high-risk area. 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 letter are being sent to the Director of Office of Management and Budget and appropriate congressional committees including the Committees on Intelligence, Appropriations, Armed Services, and Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, United States Senate; and the Committees on Intelligence, Appropriations, Armed Services, and Oversight and Reform, United States House of Representatives. In addition, the letter will be available on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

I appreciate ODNI's commitment to these important issues, especially as the United States faces an increasingly complex and interconnected global security environment marked by the

⁵In January 2018, we added the government-wide personnel security clearance process to our High-Risk List. In our most recent High-Risk report issued in March 2021, we reported that the government-wide personnel security process high-risk area improved to partially meeting the rating, but that the process continued to face challenges in the timely processing of clearances, measuring the quality of investigations, and ensuring the security of related information technology systems. See GAO, *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).

growing specter of strategic competition and conflict. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the issues outlined in the letter, please do not hesitate to contact me or Cathleen A. Berrick, Managing Director, Defense Capabilities and Management, at berrickc@gao.gov or 202-512-3404. 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 the 61 open recommendations as well as those additional recommendations in the high-risk areas for which ODNI has a role. Thank you for your office's attention to these matters.

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 stroke extending to the right.

Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
of the United States

Enclosures – 3

cc: The Honorable Shalanda Young, Deputy Director, Office of Management and Budget

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