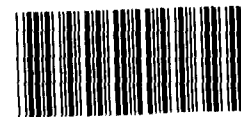


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Federal Information Resources Management Act  
(S. 1742)

Statement of  
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Comptroller General

Before the  
Committee on Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate



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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss S. 1742--the Federal Information Resources Management Act of 1989 (S. 1742, 101st Cong., 1st Sess. (1989)). The purpose of the bill is to further the goals of paperwork reduction and to provide for comprehensive information resources management (IRM) of federal departments and agencies. It reauthorizes the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980 and is designed to reduce the burden of duplicative government paperwork for business, educational institutions, and individuals; to improve the information infrastructure and statistical data base of the federal government; to set a national information resources management policy, including the improvement of public access to government information; and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA).

We support the bill's thrust towards continuing to reduce the burden of federal paperwork and initiating changes in the way information is managed in the federal sector. The complexity and cost of federal information systems--billions of dollars every year--along with the technological challenges facing the nation over the next few years call for such changes and for strong leadership on the part of both Congress and the agencies.

I would like to comment briefly on a few key provisions of the bill addressed by recent GAO work--the need for information management leadership in the agencies and the paperwork reduction responsibilities of OMB. While to date we have little completed

GAO work in other critical areas included in this legislation-- statistical policy, information dissemination, and public access, we have established a new issue area in GAO on "Government Information and Statistics" which will provide broader coverage of these topics in the future.

Role of the Chief Information  
Resources Management Official

Federal agencies are facing a crisis in managing their information resources. For example, in testimony before your Subcommittee on Government Information and Regulation last June,<sup>1</sup> we reported that the government spends about \$20 billion each year on information technology. Yet we could not identify a single large systems development project that met each of three important criteria-- satisfying user needs, coming in on time, and reasonably meeting original cost estimates. In our report Meeting the Government's Technology Challenge which is being released today,<sup>2</sup> we identified several fundamental principles that government agencies must follow to improve their management of information technology. Development and implementation of information systems should proceed under well-defined plans which provide a clear vision of how information is to be used to further agency objectives. Service to the public should always be a key consideration, and top management within the agency must always be seriously involved in the process.

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<sup>1</sup>Statement of Ralph V. Carlone (GAO/T-IMTEC-89-9; June 12, 1989)

<sup>2</sup>Meeting the Government's Technology Challenge: Results of a GAO Symposium, (GAO/IMTEC-90-23 February 21, 1990).

The establishment of a chief information resources management official at each agency as a career appointee having the necessary qualifications and experience should help agencies better focus on information management. But while this official may seek to promote the effective acquisition, management, and use of information resources, his effectiveness will be dependent to a large extent on the interest, attention, and understanding given to information management by other top agency officials. The bill recognizes this. It promotes greater awareness and understanding of information management by calling for the chief information official to develop and implement formal training programs on IRM concepts (section 3506 (c) (2)), and for the OIRA Administrator to ensure that such training is done (section 3504 (a) (6)). Training for agency program officials is essential and needs to receive a high priority if meaningful progress is to be made.

Need For a Strategic Approach  
to Information Management

Effective information resources management is essential to carrying out vital national functions. The delivery of these vital services by the government--such as tax processing, air traffic control, and national defense--depends directly on good information management practices, including the effective use of information technology.

In too many instances agencies do not complete strategic IRM plans and develop plans that are not integrated into their mission plans and goals. As a result, millions of dollars are spent on major

information systems that do not meet agency needs, do not perform as desired, are not cost effective, and are not compatible with existing or future agency systems.

There are opportunities and challenges for improved program management through IRM, and program managers should be the agencies' front-line information managers in meeting that challenge. Agencies should also be encouraged to incorporate IRM explicitly in their strategic plans and to link these plans to the agency's mission and budget.

#### The Quality of Public Information

We concur in the central purpose of S.1742: to "ensure the greatest possible public benefit from information collected, maintained, used, disseminated, and retained by the Federal Government." Much of our work in reviewing OMB's approval process for agency data-collection requests focused on achieving the proper balance between minimizing the public's paperwork burden while assuring the best possible quality in the information to be produced. One of our reviews examined changes in the paperwork burden<sup>3</sup> and found some increases, primarily associated with applications for benefits and regulatory and compliance collections. On the other hand, we found little real change in the paperwork burden for business generally. Another report assessed OMB's process for assuring information quality in its forms

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<sup>3</sup>Paperwork Reduction: Little Real Burden Change in Recent Years (GAO/PEMD-89-19FS, June 1989).

clearance process.<sup>4</sup> We found problems with both quality and timeliness in this process: reviews were slower than in earlier years, there was a large increase in the number of reviews exceeding the legally authorized time limits, some OMB approved requests were technically flawed, and review policies were inconsistently applied. We concluded that some changes in OMB's procedures could lead to notable improvement in information quality.

#### Commission on Federal Information

We support the creation of the Commission (section 203) which is designed to study the gathering, processing, analysis, and dissemination of information by the federal government. The weaknesses in OMB's forms clearance process are directly addressed by the Commission's mandate to improve the quality and timeliness of OMB's reviews of agency data collection requests.

However, we feel the Commission's role should be expanded to include examining how well agencies use information internally to manage or to achieve their mission objectives. At the same time, the tasks already laid out for the Commission are so broad that they could not be accomplished in any meaningful way by July 1991. We suggest a later reporting date.

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<sup>4</sup>Paperwork Reduction: Mixed Effects on Agency Decision Processes and Data Availability (GAO/PEMD-89-20, Sept. 1989).

### OMB Delegation of Authority

Our recent reports on paperwork reduction also found that some agencies have organized themselves effectively to meet the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act and obtain approval for virtually all of their information collection requests without major modifications. We found that the subsequent review of data collection requests by OMB for such agencies was redundant, and we recommended that OMB exercise existing authority to delegate approval to these agencies. OMB could modify or retract its delegation if agency performance declined. OMB has not yet acted upon this recommendation, which we believe would improve the efficiency and timeliness of the forms clearance function. The bill continues to authorize such delegations.

### GAO Reviews of OIRA and the Agencies

The requirement in section 110 for a report by GAO, no later than July 1, 1991, on the overall effectiveness and attentiveness of OIRA and the agencies in meeting all of the responsibilities assigned by law, is unnecessary. GAO already has sufficient authority to do such work. Further, if enacted, the requirements of section 110 would draw too heavily on our limited staff resources; we do not believe, in any event, that we could determine the impact of the bill on agency activities in the time specified. In lieu of a specific legislative requirement, it would be preferable for us to work with the Committee to determine matters of greatest concern and concentrate our efforts in those areas.

That concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman, except that I have attached several technical comments to my statement which are largely directed toward assuring that GAO and other legislative agencies are not subject to authority of the Administrator of General Services or the Archivist. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or the other Committee members might have.



Proposed technical changes to s.1742

1. Page 15, section (d), amending 44 U.S.C. 3504(f). The first word of the new paragraphs (4), (5), and (6) should respectively be "overseeing", "conducting", and "recommending."
2. Page 61, section 301, amending 44 U.S.C. 3302. The law currently directs the Archivist to promulgate regulations establishing records disposal procedures. The proposed amendment would add that the regulations are "binding on all Federal agencies." Because the law currently defines "Federal agency to include . . . any establishment in the legislative . . . branch," it appears that GAO would be bound by the Archivist's regulations. We recommend changing "Federal agencies" to "Executive agencies."
3. Page 63, section (C) (2) amending 44 U.S.C. 2906. Currently, 44 U.S.C. 2906(a)(1), entitled "Inspection of agency records," provides that the Administrator of General Services and the Archivist (or designees), in carrying out their responsibilities under Chapter 29 of title 44:

". . . may inspect the records or records management practices and programs of any Federal agency solely for the purpose of rendering recommendations for the improvement of records management practices and programs . . ."

The proposed amendment would delete the word "solely," and add:

"The Archivist (or his designee) may inspect the records of any Federal agency for the purpose of determining whether records in the custody of the agency have sufficient historical, administrative, legal, research or other value to warrant further preservation by the government."

We recommend that the words "Federal agency" be changed to "Executive agency".