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Acting Comptroller General
of the United States

Accessible Version

July 22, 2026

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Commerce

Dear Secretary Lutnick:

The purpose of this letter is to call your personal attention to two areas where open recommendations to the Department of Commerce (Commerce) should be given high priority.

In January 2026, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 77 percent of our recommendations made 5 years ago were implemented.¹ Commerce's recommendation implementation rate was 73 percent. As of June 2026, Commerce has 130 open recommendations, including eight priority recommendations.² Since our May 2025 letter, Commerce implemented one priority recommendation.³ Fully implementing the remaining open priority recommendations could significantly improve Commerce's mission delivery and risk management.

We are highlighting the following areas that warrant your timely and focused attention:

- **Improving planning for the decennial census.** Census data are used to apportion the seats of the House of Representatives, support many private sector business decisions, and allocate hundreds of billions of dollars each year in federal financial assistance. Census planning is an enormous and complex undertaking. The Census Bureau (Bureau) implemented a series of innovations to rein in cost increases and enhance data quality of recent decennial censuses. However, the Bureau has not fully assessed the effectiveness of various activities to count [hard-to enumerate populations](#) or leveraged this information to improve census cost and accuracy, as we recommended. Taking these actions will better position the Bureau to plan for the 2030 Census and effectively count hard-to-enumerate groups.

¹GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2025*, [GAO-26-900644](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 29, 2026).

²GAO considers a recommendation to be a priority if when implemented, it may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

³GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Commerce*, [GAO-25-108059](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 22, 2025). In this letter, we identified eight priority recommendations. Since then, in addition to the one recommendation that was implemented, we added one new priority recommendation.

- **Protecting personally identifiable information.** Federal agencies, including Commerce, collect and process large amounts of personally identifiable information (PII) for various government programs. Accordingly, they must ensure that any PII they collect, store, or process is protected from unauthorized access, tampering, or loss. However, Commerce has not yet incorporated privacy into its organization-wide [risk management strategy](#), including determining its privacy risk tolerance, as we recommended. Doing so will enable Commerce to better mitigate privacy risks and help ensure PII is protected.

In February 2025, we issued our biennial update to GAO's [High Risk List](#).⁴ Several government-wide high risk areas have direct implications for Commerce and its operations, including [ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation](#). We also identified actions Commerce should take to reduce fragmentation, overlap, and duplication. For example, we reported that, as of March 2026, Commerce was one of six agencies with at least 20 open recommendations related to duplication and cost savings. More information on our [Duplication and Cost Savings](#) work can be found on the GAO website.

A comprehensive list of open recommendations, including new priority recommendations, and information about their status can be found on the GAO website at [Recommendations Database | U.S. GAO](#). Copies of this letter are being sent to the appropriate congressional committees.⁵ This letter will also be available at [Priority Recommendations | U.S. GAO](#).

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss how to address our open recommendations, as we pursue the shared goal of working to increase efficiency and effectiveness of government programs and spending. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Cardell Johnson, Managing Director, Strategic Issues Team at JohnsonCD1@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this letter. Thank you for your personal attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General
of the United States

cc: Paul M. Dabbar, Deputy Secretary, Department of Commerce

⁴This list identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, [GAO-25-107743](#) (Washington, D.C.: February 25, 2025).

⁵We also help Congress identify congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022) (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 719 note). Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on agencies' progress in implementing priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act.

Jennifer Hesch, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, performing the non-exclusive functions and duties of the Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Secretary for Administration

George Cook, Chief of Staff to the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, performing the functions and duties of the Director of the Census Bureau

Arvind Raman, Under Secretary for Standards and Technology and Director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology

Dr. Neil Jacobs, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, and NOAA Administrator

MaryAnn Mausser, GAO/OIG Audit Liaison