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Washington, DC 20548

Acting Comptroller General
of the United States

July 20, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Homeland Security

Dear Secretary Mullin:

The purpose of this letter is to call your personal attention to three areas where open recommendations to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) 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 DHS's recommendation implementation rate was 86 percent. As of July 2026, DHS has 507 open recommendations, including 39 priority recommendations.² Since our May 2025 letter, DHS implemented five priority recommendations.³ I appreciate DHS's continued commitment to addressing our recommendations, which will better position the department to more effectively and efficiently achieve its mission.

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

- **Improving disaster preparedness and response.** DHS is responsible for several disaster response, recovery, and mitigation programs that assist communities impacted by federally declared emergencies and major disasters. However, communities face challenges receiving aid due to fragmentation across disaster recovery programs. Specifically, we have reported that state and local officials cited challenges navigating multiple federal recovery programs with differing requirements and time frames; multiple federal authorities; and limited data sharing. We recommended that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) better manage fragmentation between its disaster recovery programs and other

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. The 507 open recommendations are those that are included in publicly available products.

³GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Homeland Security*, [GAO-25-108010](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 14, 2025). In this letter, we identified 39 priority recommendations. Since then, in addition to the five that were implemented, we closed two recommendations that were no longer valid, and we added seven new priority recommendations.

federal programs by [standardizing, simplifying, or consolidating requirements](#), among other options. Doing so could improve service delivery to disaster survivors and communities; reduce federal fiscal exposure; and improve the effectiveness of recovery efforts.

- **Enhancing information technology and cybersecurity.** DHS invests billions of dollars each year to acquire IT and other capabilities to support the department's functions. For example, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) established the Continuous Diagnostics and Mitigation program in 2012 to strengthen the cybersecurity of government networks and systems. However, some agencies have not fully implemented this program due to a lack of guidance. Similarly, CISA provides technical assistance to help critical infrastructure owners and operators address cyber risks in operational technology, but CISA has not issued guidance to Sector Risk Management Agencies on collaboration with other agencies to mitigate these risks. We recommended that CISA issue guidance to facilitate implementation of [network security and data protection capabilities](#) as well as guidance on collaboration to mitigate cyber risks to [operational technology](#). This would help ensure that agencies have the information needed to enhance cybersecurity visibility and address cyber risks.
- **Strengthening immigration and border security policies and data.** DHS is responsible for securing the nation's borders and administering the nation's immigration system. Public reporting by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) understates the total number of individuals detained by tens of thousands of individuals. In addition, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has made progress deploying large-scale non-intrusive inspection systems, such as X-ray machines, for commercial and passenger vehicles at land ports of entry. However, CBP's deployment plans for these systems at the southwest border omit nine vehicle crossings that account for nearly 40 percent of passenger vehicle traffic at that border. We recommended that ICE report data on the total number of [detentions of individuals](#), and CBP update its [deployment plans](#). Doing so could ensure decision-makers and the public have a more complete understanding of annual immigration detentions and would strengthen interdiction efforts.

Two of these areas—[federal disaster assistance](#) and [DHS's management functions, including information technology](#)—are also included on GAO's [High Risk List](#).⁴ Several other government-wide high risk areas have direct implications for DHS and its operations, including [ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation](#). We also identified actions DHS should take to reduce fragmentation, overlap, and duplication. For example, we reported that DHS's Science and Technology Directorate could better manage overlap by reviewing proposed Federally Funded Research and Development Center projects for [unnecessary overlap](#) with DHS component-funded research and development. 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](#)

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).

[| 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 appreciate the continued communication and discussion with the Department on our open recommendations. We understand that DHS is reviewing our open recommendations, and we believe this provides the opportunity for us to further discuss how to address them, 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 Jason L. Bair, Managing Director, Homeland Security and Justice Team at BairJ@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: The Honorable Troy Edgar, Deputy Secretary
Benjamin C. Huffman, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary for Management
Sean Curran, Director, U.S. Secret Service
Karen Evans, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Administrator, FEMA
Rodney Scott, Commissioner, CBP
Todd M. Lyons, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director, ICE
Matthew Kozma, Under Secretary, Office of Intelligence and Analysis
Admiral Kevin E. Lunday, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard
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Antoine McCord, Acting Director, Office of Biometric Identity Management
Holly C. Mehringer, Senior Officer Performing the Duties of the Chief Financial Officer
Roland Edwards, Chief Human Capital Officer
Paul Courtney, Chief Procurement Officer
Faron K. Paramore, Director, Federal Protective Service
Pedro M. Allende, Under Secretary, Science and Technology

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.

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