

Staff Placed on Administrative Leave Have Returned and Await Direction

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A report to congressional requesters

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What GAO Found

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) is an independent establishment in the executive branch that coordinates the federal response to homelessness. It consists of representatives from designated federal agencies (the Council) and a staff that has ranged from 10 to 18 full-time employees over the past decade.

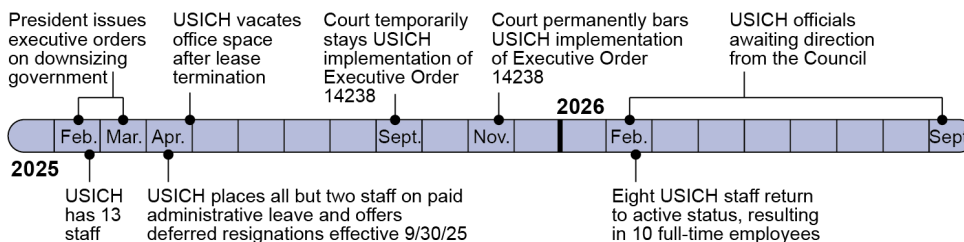
USICH's enabling legislation—the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act—requires it to maintain certain personnel and perform specified duties. These include providing technical assistance to state and local governments through five to 10 regional coordinators employed by the Council, reporting annually to the President and Congress on federal efforts to address homelessness, and developing a national strategic plan to end homelessness.

The act also established a termination date for USICH, which Congress has extended several times, most recently to October 1, 2028. The President's most recent budget proposes to terminate USICH in fiscal year 2027.

USICH began making changes to its staffing and operations in early 2025, including in response to Executive Order 14238, Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy. In April 2025, 11 of USICH's 13 employees were placed on paid administrative leave. In the same month, the General Services Administration terminated USICH's office lease and recovered its equipment.

In November 2025, a federal district court found that USICH's implementation of the executive order was unlawful. The court noted that the personnel reduction made it impossible for USICH to perform its statutory duties, among other things. The court set aside USICH's prior actions to implement the order and barred it from doing so in the future. USICH has appealed the decision.

Selected Developments Affecting the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), January 2025–September 2026



Source: GAO analysis (legal); USICH (staffing and operations). | GAO-27-108779

Eight of 11 USICH employees returned from paid administrative leave in mid-February 2026. The other three left USICH prior to employees' return to active status. As of May 2026, USICH had 10 full-time employees and a part-time executive director. USICH staff told GAO that, since their return, they had not received direction from the Council or the executive director on homelessness policies or priorities to guide their work or help them perform USICH's statutory duties and functions. The executive director stated that the Council should provide guidance before USICH drafts a strategic plan or undertakes policy initiatives.

Why GAO Did This Study

Several federal agencies administer programs to address homelessness, and USICH was created in 1987 to coordinate these efforts and reduce homelessness.

In early 2025, the President issued a series of directives to downsize the federal workforce and reorganize federal agencies. Among these, Executive Order 14238, issued in March 2025, directed seven federal entities—including USICH—to eliminate nonstatutory functions and to reduce statutory functions and associated personnel to the minimum required by law.

GAO was asked to review USICH's statutory responsibilities and recent changes to its staffing and operations. This report describes (1) USICH's responsibilities under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and (2) the status of its staffing and operations.

GAO reviewed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, relevant executive orders, court documents, and appropriations acts. GAO also reviewed USICH documentation, interviewed USICH's executive director and staff, and requested information from three Council member agencies.