

07-1914

Secretary

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528**Homeland
Security**

September 5, 2007

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
H2-176 Ford Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson:

Thank you for your August 9, 2007 letter regarding the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC), the Terrorist Screening Database (TSDB), and coordination between the TSC, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and other Federal departments and agencies on the use of terrorist watchlist data. DHS works in full partnership with the TSC on terrorist watchlist and screening matters, and I have coordinated our response directly with the TSC.

The TSC has staff dedicated to quality assurance and redress to ensure that the TSDB records are current, accurate, and thorough. The TSC Nominations and Data Integrity Unit (NDIU) reviews each record nominated to the TSDB to make certain that (1) the nominating agency has provided sufficient information to demonstrate the individual has a nexus to terrorism, (2) the identifying information provided by the nominator appears to be accurate and valid, and (3) the TSDB record will be made available to all appropriate TSC customers for use in screening (e.g., inclusion on No Fly List or Selectee List if criteria is met). The TSC's quality assurance process takes both an overall and targeted review of the TSDB records based on specific data quality problems identified by the TSC personnel or the TSC partner agencies, as well as projects like the examination of the No Fly List that consist of record-by-record reviews to address data quality concerns in a subset of the TSDB records. Finally, there is a redress process available that provides for an in-depth review of any watchlist record that is the cause of an individual's complaint.

The TSC uses information from a number of government databases to help ensure information in the TSDB is accurate and current. The TSC has access to the nominating agencies' key databases containing the source information for watchlist records. The two primary nominating agency databases are the FBI's case management database and the National Counterterrorism Center's Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE). Through these systems, the TSC has access to the most up-to-date information maintained by the nominating agencies regarding terrorist watchlist records. The TSC's practice during its nominations, redress, quality assurance, and encounter process is to check these databases to confirm the TSDB contains the most current and accurate information possible. The TSC also has access to other government systems that can assist in making an accurate identity match during a screening encounter and can also help identify data quality problems in the TSDB.

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The TSDB quality assurance is an ongoing process that is dependent upon the availability of information pertaining to watchlisted subjects. Currently, the TSC receives information regarding name changes, deaths, and similar occurrences through the nominations process from the National Counterterrorism Center, and associated nominating agencies. If a name change or death is either not known to these agencies or not reported to the TSC, that information will not be integrated into the TSDB.

Terrorist watchlisting quality assurance is a priority shared among the U.S. Government elements involved in terrorist-related screening. Agencies that nominate persons to the TSDB, along with the National Counterterrorism Center, also have quality assurance responsibilities that are carried out before nominations are sent to the TSC. These agencies internally identify and correct data quality errors before the information is passed to the TSC, which helps to improve the accuracy of the TSDB data.

The TSC and DHS work cooperatively with Federal department and agency elements involved in terrorist-related screening. The TSC has entered into agreements with several Federal entities including but not limited to the following agencies within the U.S. Government that use the TSDB datasets for screening:

- Transportation Security Administration
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
- U.S. Department of State
- U.S. Department of Defense

The TSDB data is also made available to other Federal agencies as well as State, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement agencies through the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) system, which receives the TSDB data on a real-time basis.

From time to time, the TSC also works with agencies (by formal agreement or informal understanding) to perform data comparisons in order to improve the quality of the TSDB. For example, the TSC partners with the FBI to compare the names of FBI subjects of terrorism cases against the TSDB to ensure that all names are included and that the names of cleared individuals have been removed.

The TSDB data is also currently used in the private sector by airlines to carry out commercial air passenger screening against the TSA No Fly and Selectee Lists, which are generated from the TSDB. This screening responsibility will be assumed by TSA with the launch of the Secure Flight program. The TSC is also working closely with DHS to finalize plans for a private sector screening program, as mandated by paragraph (4) of Homeland Security Presidential Directive-6.

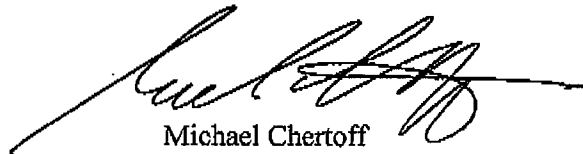
While the TSC has actively and successfully partnered with other Federal departments and agencies to pursue screening opportunities, during 2005 and 2006, the TSC attempted to work together with the Social Security Administration (SSA) in an unsuccessful effort to reach an

agreement to perform a batch comparison of the TSDB against the SSA's name change database. The TSC's goal in this endeavor was to identify any previously unknown aliases of persons listed within the TSDB to identify these individuals during screening. The SSA explained that its privacy regulations did not allow for the sharing of its name-change database in order to perform the comparison described above.

Overall, together with the TSC and all of our partners throughout the U.S. Government's screening community, DHS continues to make great strides as we explore new terrorist screening opportunities and refine existing programs. The TSC and DHS will continue to work closely with both public and private elements to ensure the success of our screening programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the issues you raised. Please contact me if you would like anything further on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Chertoff", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Chertoff