



ClearanceJobs®



# STATE OF THE SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS

1H 2023

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A letter from our President and Founder, Evan Lesser

Last year ushered in major progress in the government's Trusted Workforce 2.0 overhaul. From Continuous Vetting to updated Federal Investigative Standards, major muscle movements in updating the government's more than fifty-year-old personnel security program continue to take place. But while the method of vetting cleared candidates improves, the marketplace for cleared talent continues to tighten. 2023 is poised to be an even more difficult year in cleared recruiting, even as aspects of the security clearance program improve.

There are many moving parts in personnel vetting today. They include the roles of the Security Executive Agent at the Office of the Director of Intelligence (ODNI), the Suitability Executive Agent at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), congress, and other stakeholders. As reform continues to move forward, each of these elements will need to continue working in tandem to ensure both the security clearance process and employee onboarding process create qualified, competent pipelines.

Information, awareness, and advocacy are key to helping to build trust within – and outside of – the cleared community. The 1H 2023 State of the Security Clearance Process again provides actionable insights into the state of the security clearance process today. From clearance processing times, to denials and revocations, and clearance hot topics, consider it the news you can use as you look to build and expand the cleared community – across your company, organization, or agency.



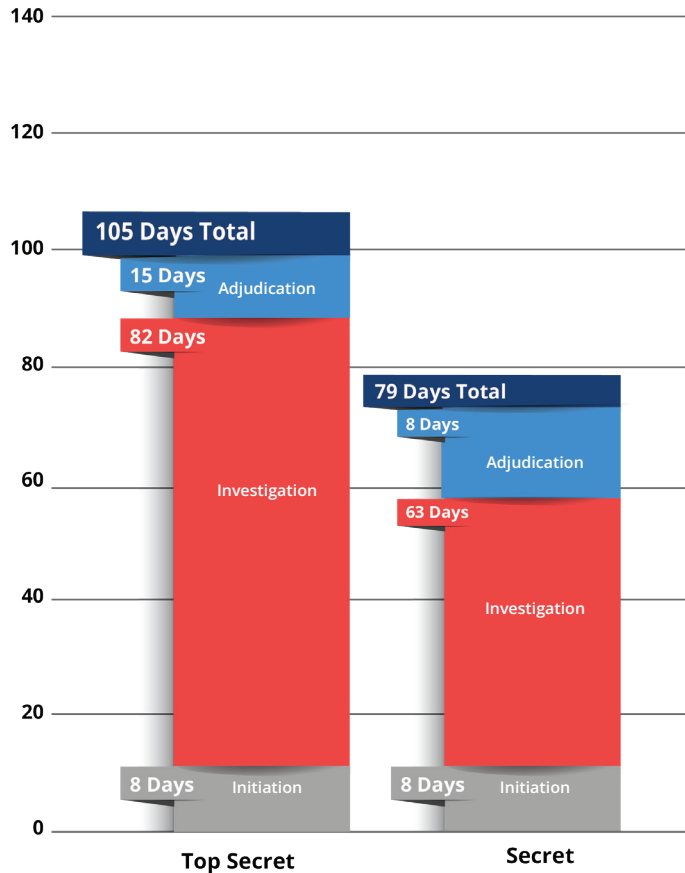
President and Founder of ClearanceJobs

## 2023: A TRANSFORMATION TRANSITION YEAR

The mantra of 2022 was the steady movement of Trusted Workforce 2.0 initiatives. The entire cleared workforce was enrolled into a Trusted Workforce 1.5 Continuous Vetting Process, the National Background Investigation Services enrolled new agencies and employers into its eApp portal, and the Office of Personnel Management announced plans for a new security clearance application.

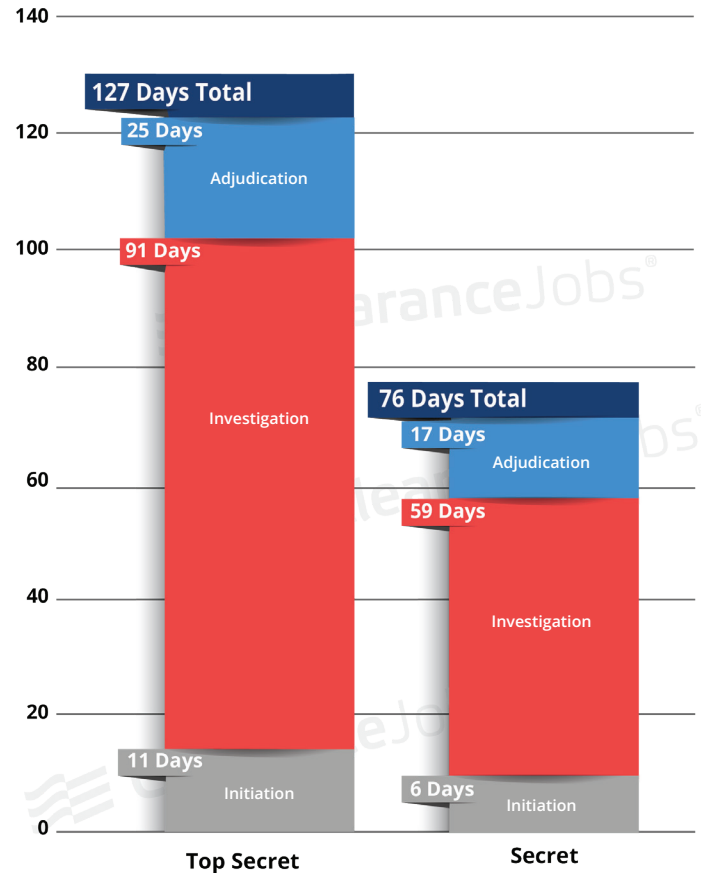
Because Trusted Workforce 2.0 is an iterative and not incremental transformation process, all of these changes took place simultaneously, often around or in support of other transformation efforts – and all while keeping security clearance processing times at baseline, and making improvements to issues like reciprocity.

## How long it takes to obtain a DoD/Industry Security Clearance



Source: November NISPPAC Update

## How long it takes to obtain a Government-wide Security Clearance



Source: Performance.gov

## TOP ISSUES THAT CAUSE SECURITY CLEARANCE DENIAL

Adjudicative Category	Number of Denied Cases		Adjudicative Category	Number of Denied Cases	
	2021	2022		2021	2022
<b>Guideline A:</b> Allegiance to the U.S.	0	0	<b>Guideline H:</b> Drug Involvement	71	148 ▲
<b>Guideline B:</b> Foreign Influence	49	64 ▲	<b>Guideline I:</b> Psychological Conditions	11	26 ▲
<b>Guideline C:</b> Foreign Preference	6	8 ▲	<b>Guideline J:</b> Criminal Conduct	43	101 ▲
<b>Guideline D:</b> Sexual Behavior	16	31 ▲	<b>Guideline K:</b> Handling Protected Information	3	10 ▲
<b>Guideline E:</b> Personal Conduct	94	247 ▲	<b>Guideline L:</b> Outside Activity	0	1 ▲
<b>Guideline F:</b> Financial Consideration	319	624 ▲	<b>Guideline M:</b> Use of IT System	4	11 ▲
<b>Guideline G:</b> Alcohol Consumption	22	82 ▲			

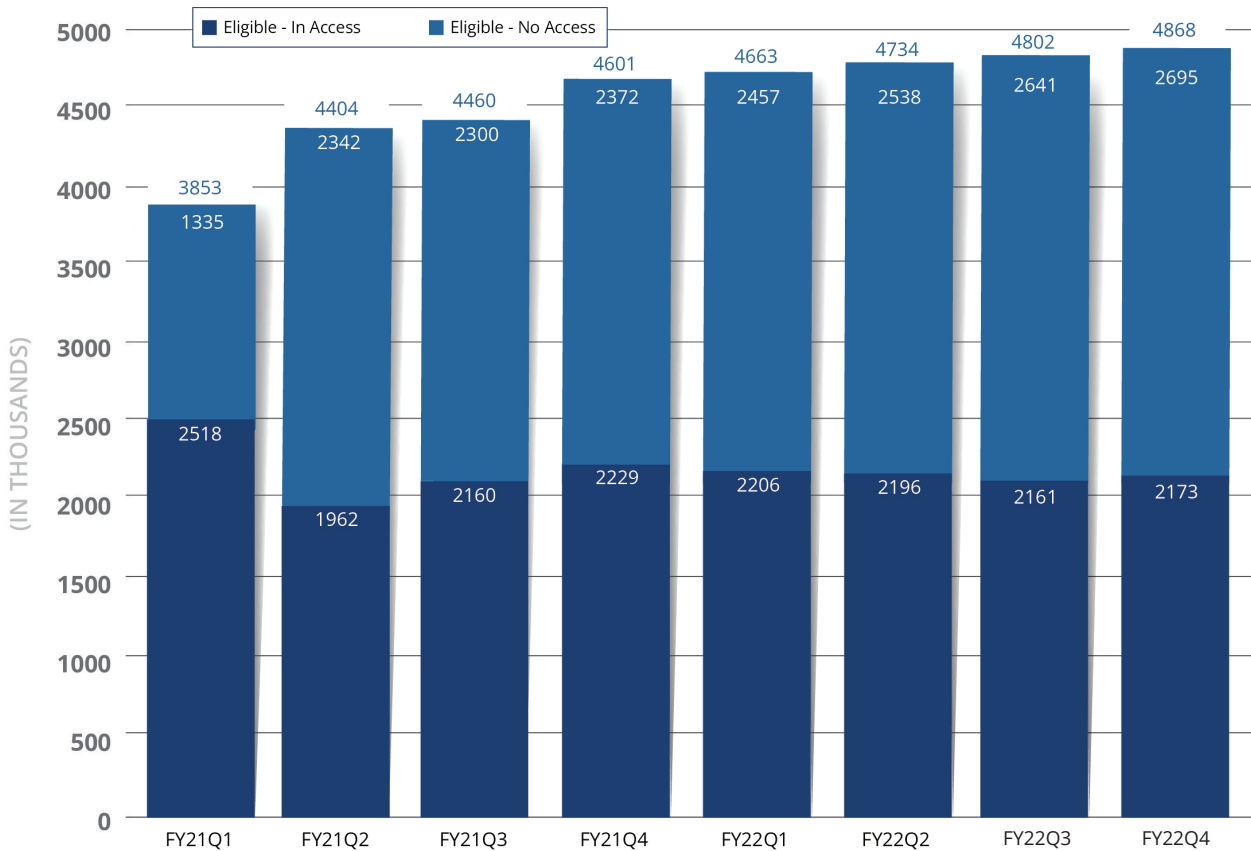
Source: <https://doha.ogc.osd.mil/>

Appeals Denied Eligibility	728	Favorable Decision Reversed to Denial	6
Appeals Granted Eligibility	198	Board Remanded to Agency	11

Overall numbers of clearance denials is still incredibly low – but it’s worth noting causes of clearance denial increased across almost all categories, with fairly significant increases in finances, sexual behavior, and use of IT systems guidelines. Inflation, recession, and remote work are all contributing factors that can cause an uptick in denials and revocations for these issues.

## BIG AND SMALL

DoD National Security Population Eligibility & Access



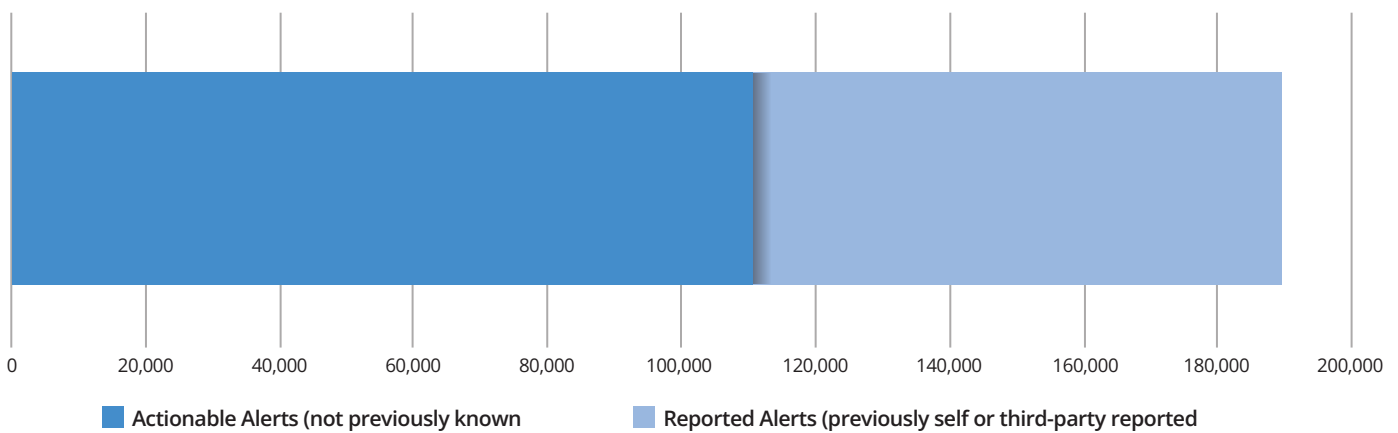
The overall number of individuals with a DoD clearance continues to rise, according to data released by the Security, Suitability, and Credentialing Performance Advisability Council. The total number of DoD clearances is at 4.86 million from what had been 3.6 million two years prior. But as we’ve previously noted, while the eligible population goes up, the number of individuals actively putting those clearances to use is actually 200,000 individuals less than 2020. Blame remote work or the great resignation, but if you find yourself facing a dwindling talent pool in the cleared space (a market reality recruiters attest to), that dwindling in-access cleared population is a key part of the problem.

DCSA continues to close an average of 14,000 industry clearances cases each month – but with 77,000 new cleared positions posted each month, the supply isn’t sufficient to meet the demand.

## CONTINUOUS VETTING (CV) SUCCESS

The entire national security sensitive population is fully enrolled in Trusted Workforce 1.5 solution. That means periodic reinvestigations have been replaced by CV. That doesn't mean security clearance holders will never have to submit another SF-86. The government offered guidance that under Trusted Workforce 2.0 that SF-86 data should be collected every five years for all clearance holders, and DCSA notified cleared contractors of the requirement in August. While requiring an SF-86 at a five-year-interval is actually sooner than was previously required for Secret clearance holders, DCSA emphasized that CV enrollment means fewer subject and verification interviews, and therefore a cheaper and more streamlined process than conducting a time-triggered investigation. Consider the updated SF-86 like self reporting on steroids. A culture of self-reporting is a critical aspect of CV, and one the government continues to emphasize. When it comes to adjudicatively significant data (whether it's a DUI or a debt), self-reporting may be the best way to mitigate the issue.

### FY22 Continuous Vetting Alerts



*Chart above reflects only DCSA data and is current through 09/30/2022*



## TRUSTED WORKFORCE 1.5 – ALL OF CLEARED WORKFORCE CURRENTLY ENROLLED



Eligibility



Terrorism



Criminal  
Activity



Foreign  
Travel



Financial  
Activity



Credit



Public  
Records

### COMING SOON: THE PERSONNEL VETTING QUESTIONNAIRE (PVQ)

A Federal Register announcement in November provided more information on the document that will one day (likely in 2024 or beyond) replace the SF-86 and SF-85 security clearance questionnaires. The Personnel Vetting Questionnaire (PVQ) works hand-in-hand with the overall Trusted Workforce 2.0 effort to modernize and streamline the security clearance process. Powered by NBIS and eApp, the PVQ both eliminates some questions from the current form and adds others. Simple changes like intuitive logic in questions will make the form much easier for applicants to complete. The consolidation of multiple forms into a single questionnaire with different sections supports the Trusted Workforce 2.0 consolidation from five to three tiers of security clearance investigations.

POSITION DESIGNATION	CURRENT FORM	PVQ PART
Non-Sensitive Low Risk	SF-85	Part A
Non-Sensitive Moderate Risk Public Trust	SF-85P	Part A & Part B
Non-Sensitive High Risk Public Trust	SF-85P	Part A & Part B
Non-Critical Sensitive Moderate Risk Public Trust	SF-86	Part A, Part B & Part C
Critical-Sensitive High Risk Public Trust	SF-86	Part A, Part B & Part C
Special-Sensitive High Risk Public Trust	SF-86	Part A, Part B & Part C
Non-Sensitive Moderate Risk or High Risk Law Enforcement Position as specified by an agency	SF-85P & SF-85P-S	Part A, Part B & Part D





## THE ROLE OF CONGRESS IN THE CLEARANCE PROCESS

Security clearance policies are born out of executive order. The president has wide purview when it comes to establishing the processes around classification and determining who gets a security clearance. That doesn't mean the other branches of government don't have a role to play. If the executive branch is the head, Congress is the eyes, looking forward and making sure the government's security program stays on its feet.

The Senate Intelligence Authorization Act is a document that gives a look into the policy priorities or areas of concern for the clearance program in the future. The 2023 Intelligence Authorization Act highlights 11 issues related to the clearance process. A few worth noting include:

### **Requiring the IC to establish a methodology for how long it takes to onboard personnel.**

The IC has long been criticized that when it comes to its clearance and onboarding figures, the timelines are made up and the dates don't matter. Critics (and contractors trying to onboard personnel), find vast disparity between reported figures and actual times, and that often comes down to how onboarding and initiation of cases is considered. The IAA calls for more oversight into onboarding (including the clearance process), and a plan for improving timelines for agencies with times over 180 days.

### **Polygraph timeliness and accountability.**

The polygraph always has critics. But its effectiveness in getting applicants to offer up information not previously disclosed continues to make it a vital part of the IC's application process. But the current polygraph process has two problems – accusations of inconsistency or bias among polygraphers, and widespread delays in obtaining a polygraph (often due to a lack of qualified polygraphers). The IAA seeks accountability on both problems.

### **Prohibiting clearance denials related to drug use.**

Drugs continue to be an ongoing issue tripping up applicants. Over the past year ODNI has sought to ensure drug use prior to application doesn't affect clearance eligibility, but agencies continue to set their own suitability requirements concerning periods of abstinence. The IAA prohibits clearance denials based on pre-employment drug use.

### **Clearances for key personnel not tied to a contract.**

The number of individuals with a clearance used to be at least one million more than the current figures. Following a series of insider threats, the director of ODNI required desk audits and a major crack down on individuals who had been issued a clearance without a direct need. Fast forward to today and the demand for cleared talent far outpaces supply, and many contractors and agencies struggle to onboard personnel in support positions who may have a tertiary, but not direct tie to a cleared position. The IAA opens up a small degree of flexibility for clearance sponsorships for key personnel who may not be directly tied to a cleared contract.



### **SECURITY CLEARANCE HOT TOPICS:**

Following the track of security clearance denials and revocations it's clear – as the world recovers from COVID-19, specific issues will come up in the security clearance process with greater frequency. Financial issues are increasing for security clearance applicants. And remote work opens up new opportunities for issues with both the misuse of IT systems and sexual behavior adjudicative guidelines. And thanks to Continuous Vetting, what happens in your bank account, your work laptop, or in the back of a police car won't likely stay there.



One factor that has increased potential for insider threat is the rise in remote work across workplaces. Dr. Eric Lang, director of the DoD Personnel and Security Research Center, or PERSEREC, noted 62% of individuals don't follow security protocols as closely at home as they do in the office. Among insider threat criminal prosecutions, 75% involve remote workers. A key factor is simply the nature of doing work away from the office, and the ease in printing or stealing proprietary or confidential information. And because insider threats and risks aren't just about the malicious actors – but the nonmalicious actors – remote work opens up the 'sloppy' security practices that can increase risk for companies.

Mitigating issues requires security clearance holders to be proactive, and employers in the cleared space are looking for ways to engage their employees, creating opportunities for reporting issues and launching their own tools to tackle employee monitoring and background checks. With remote work options for cleared workers unlikely to go away, companies are navigating how to manage cleared employees working in a hybrid environment, where insider risks are more prevalent, according to the research, but sometimes harder to spot.

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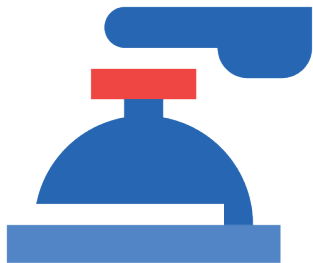


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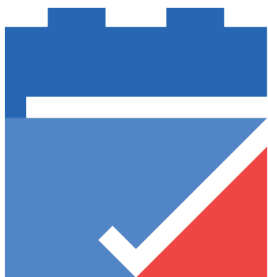
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