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DHS Still Struggling for a Unified Approach Regarding Immigration

In a new report released today, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) explained that almost 15 years after the creation of DHS, its component agencies still face challenges taking a unified approach to immigration enforcement and administration activities. Although DHS has established a unity of effort initiative to break silos and centralize decision making, problems remain.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services continue to face inefficiencies regarding mission allocation and expenditure comparisons, the affirmative asylum application process, and the Department's struggle to understand immigration outcomes and decisions. The audit also revealed component coordination difficulties pertaining to the availability of bed space, language services, and processing aliens.

The challenges exist because DHS did not have a designated Department-level official or group to strategically address overarching immigration issues and foster coordination and cooperation. The OIG audit recommends that DHS establish such a group; the Department agreed and has begun implementing the recommendation. DHS will seek to charter a senior level cross-component Immigration Policy Council. The new Council will provide an institutionalized structure for Department-wide strategic planning related to immigration policy and operations. At a minimum, the Council will –

- foster better awareness of roles and responsibilities;
- facilitate better coordination and communication among the involved components and guide current cross-component immigration initiatives;
- ensure components collect and report data for immigration activity and analyze the information to make decisions and reduce inefficiencies; and
- serve as mediators for conflicts regarding mission accomplishment and overarching legal, policy, and other issues.