



HERO Pilot

October 23, 2018

Fiscal Year 2018 Report to Congress



**Homeland
Security**

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Message from the Deputy Director and Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director

October 23, 2018

I am pleased to present the following report, “HERO Pilot,” which has been prepared by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

This report was compiled pursuant to the Joint Explanatory Statement, which accompanies the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 115-141).

Pursuant to congressional guidelines, this report is being provided to the following Members of Congress:



The Honorable Kevin Yoder
Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

Inquiries related to this report may be directed to me at (202) 732-3000.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Vitiello". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue horizontal line.

Ronald D. Vitiello
Deputy Director and Senior Official Performing the Duties
of the Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Executive Summary

The Human Exploitation Rescue Operative (HERO) Child Rescue Corps recruits and trains wounded, ill, or injured active-duty service members; transitioning active-duty service members; and military veterans to support law enforcement in the areas of child-exploitation investigations, child-victim identification, traveling child-sex-offender investigations, and computer forensics. The yearlong unpaid internship is managed by ICE Homeland Security Investigations' (HSI) Cyber Crimes Center (C3), the National Organization to Protect Children, and the U.S. Department of Defense's Special Operations Command. The HERO Child Rescue Corps honors the Nation's commitment to its veterans, and enables those veterans to contribute to HSI's mission.

The primary goal of the HERO Program is to recruit, train, and hire veterans, and to retain them as General Schedule (GS)-1801 Computer Forensic Analysts (CFA). These CFAs provide long-term stable support for the Computer Forensics Program, which is essential to the HSI mission. Most, if not all, criminal organizations use some form of digital communication, and the HERO CFAs are trained to acquire and analyze the data, thereby supporting investigations that disrupt and dismantle criminal activity and transnational criminal organizations. The secondary goal of the HERO Program is to provide HSI with a human capital development opportunity, allowing HERO CFAs who successfully have completed 3 years in the position to fill other vacancies within HSI.

By August 2018, HSI will have hired 105 of the 123 interns who completed the program since its inception, representing an 85-percent success rate. These former interns, now CFAs, currently are supporting complex and critical investigations across the United States, in offices where it is difficult and costly to retain GS-1811 Special Agents who have been trained as CFAs.

The FY 2018 DHS Appropriations Act (P.L. 115-141) designated \$2 million to train and hire 10 CFAs. In FY 2018, HSI's C3 Computer Forensics Unit hired 25 CFAs who had been trained in last year's HERO Program. An additional 17 HEROs completed their classroom training and are currently in the field training portion of their internships. They will complete the training program and be eligible for employment in March 2019.



HERO Pilot

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I. Legislative Requirement

This report was compiled in response to legislative language in the Joint Explanatory Statement that accompanies the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act (P.L. 115-141).

The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying P.L. 115-141 states:

The total includes \$2,000,000 for Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) to establish a pilot program to hire and train up to 10 Computer Forensics Analysts (CFAs) to support the Human Exploitation Rescue Operative (HERO) Corps' work on the above investigations. ICE is directed to report to the Committees not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act on the development, implementation, planned milestones, funding, and staffing requirements for fiscal years 2018 and 2019 for this pilot. The report shall also address this pilot's potential for expansion to principal HSI domestic offices to support investigations related to child exploitation, opioid and fentanyl smuggling, and other cybercrimes.

II. Background

The primary goal of the HERO Program is to recruit, train, and hire veterans, and to retain them as General Schedule (GS)-1801 Computer Forensic Analysts (CFA). These CFAs provide long-term stable support for the Computer Forensics Program, which is essential to the HSI mission. Most, if not all, criminal organizations use some form of digital communication, and the HERO CFAs are trained to acquire and analyze the data, thereby supporting investigations that disrupt and dismantle criminal activity and transnational criminal organizations. The secondary goal of the HERO Program is to provide HSI with a human capital development opportunity, allowing HERO CFAs who have completed 3 years in the position successfully to fill other vacancies within HSI. A third goal of the HERO Program is to enable these veterans, who then become CFAs, to support the increasingly complex and critical investigations across the United States, in offices where it is difficult and costly to retain GS-1811 Special Agents trained as CFAs.

Each HERO class begins with a position announcement through the Office of Personnel Management website, www.USAJobs.gov. The application packets are reviewed, and 50 candidates are selected for interview. Each candidate is interviewed by three panels staffed by HSI management, CFAs, and representatives from the National Organization to Protect Children and U.S. Department of Defense. Twenty-four applicants are selected to be seated for the training class with a few alternates selected to replace individuals who decline or drop out before the beginning of class. Twelve weeks of classroom training gives the students the basic technical skills and required legal knowledge to work in the field. The HEROs then transition to 40 weeks of on-the-job training (OJT) in an HSI or partner agency's field office. The OJT includes accompanying agents on warrant service, identifying and collecting digital evidence, processing the evidence, and writing reports of their findings for the case agent and prosecutor, all under close mentorship by a senior CFA.

III. Expenditures

HSI received \$2,000,000 in appropriations for the HERO Program in FY 2017, and expended \$2,933,699 in support of the program. The \$2,933,699 includes \$960,000 to train 32 new HEROs during FY 2017; \$253,299 for a HERO Program Manager in the Computer Forensics Unit (CFU) at the Cyber Crimes Center (C3); and \$1,720,400 to hire 24 CFAs in FY 2017 who were trained in FY 2016. HERO interns are offered positions as GS-1801-7/9 CFAs, with a few qualifying at the GS-1801-11 grade level.

Appropriations and Expenditures for the HERO Program					
Fiscal Year	Number Trained	Number Hired¹	Appropriation	Training and Equipment Expenditures	Payroll and General Expense (GE)
2017	32	24	\$2,000,000	\$960,000	\$1,973,699
2018	17	25	\$2,000,000	\$510,000	\$2,172,299
2019 ²	24	17		\$720,000	\$2,548,012 ³

- (1) The interns are trained in one fiscal year, and then hired in a subsequent fiscal year.
- (2) Data for FY 2019 are estimated.
- (3) FY 2019 estimate is based on full-year hires with a higher payroll/GE and a higher cost for the Program Manager. See section IV.B. for the per-person cost basis of \$134,715.

IV. Results

A. Results

As of August 2018, the HERO Program has hired 105 of the 123 participants who completed the program since its inception. Twenty-five of the participants were trained in FY 2017, then were hired during FY 2018. The additional CFAs have served to reduce the backlog of forensic exams in numerous field offices, and have provided a much-needed increase to the number of CFAs in HSI. HSI investigates violations of many hundreds of criminal statutes, and, as previously noted, most, if not all, criminal investigations collect digital devices/evidence that needs to be processed and analyzed by a CFA. The CFAs assist in all investigations, including a number of priority investigative program areas such as human trafficking and smuggling, trafficking of opioids, fentanyl, and other drugs, and child exploitation investigations. HSI plans to continue the HERO Program for the foreseeable future, provided that the additional funding and individual position numbers are available to sustain the continuation of the program.

HSI plans to expand the number of CFAs in the field offices to meet the needs of the local offices. Currently, most HEROs are hired as CFAs in the office where they completed their OJT. However, future classes may be offered positions at understaffed HSI offices to meet the needs of the agency and to expand the presence of CFAs into more office locations.

B. Expenditures

The FY 2018 appropriated funds were used to hire 25 new HEROs and to train an additional 17 interns and equip them for the nonpaid work experience portion of the program. The cost to hire the 25 GS-1801 CFAs in FY 2018 was \$1,919,000. The cost to train and equip the 17 new HEROs in FY 2018 was \$510,000. The cost for the HERO Program Manager in the CFU is \$253,299 annually. The C3 CFU supplemented the funding requirements that were above the appropriated amounts.

The anticipated cost to hire the 17 interns, who are currently in training and will be eligible for hiring as GS-1801 CFAs in FY 2019, will be \$2,289,900 based on an onboarding cost of approximately \$134,700 each. An additional \$720,000 is required to train 24 HEROs in FY 2019. The 24 HEROs will be eligible for employment in FY 2020, and the anticipated FY 2019 cost for the HERO Program Manager is \$258,112.

All funding provided by the appropriations process currently is used for direct expenses required to train, equip, and hire GS-1801 CFAs, because it is not sufficient to cover all costs related to the program. The funding is not used to fund salaries of HSI instructors or program staff, or to secure training facilities and classroom space.

V. Discussion

At an agency level, the HERO Program has been successful over its lifespan by filling a critical gap in HSI's CFA staffing, through the increase of 103 analysts. This comprises 28.6 percent of the CFA workforce, with the remainder consisting primarily of GS-1811 Special Agents trained as CFAs.

The program also has been successful on an individual level for the program participants, with an 82-percent placement rate for those individuals completing the HERO Program. The remaining 18 percent includes just four persons who sought, but were not offered, jobs in the computer forensics field. The remaining graduates did not seek employment in the field of computer forensics.

Appendix A: List of Abbreviations

C3	Cyber Crimes Center
CFA	Computer Forensic Analyst
CFU	Computer Forensics Unit
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FY	Fiscal Year
GE	General Expense
GS	General Schedule
HERO	Human Exploitation Rescue Operative
HSI	Homeland Security Investigations
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
OJT	On-the-Job Training