

# STATE OF THE SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS

1H 2026



## PROGRESS, PRESSURE, AND THE PATH FORWARD FOR TRUSTED WORKFORCE REFORM

The U.S. security clearance system enters 2026 in a familiar but increasingly consequential place: modernized in theory, uneven in execution, and under growing pressure from workforce realities.

Trusted Workforce 2.0 reforms have reshaped how the federal government thinks about vetting, shifting away from episodic reinvestigations and toward continuous risk management. Continuous Vetting (CV) is now broadly implemented across the cleared population and is poised to transform the non-sensitive Public Trust population, as well.

Yet progress has not translated evenly into predictability for cleared professionals or employers. Processing timelines remain difficult to interpret, reciprocity is still inconsistently applied, and workforce volatility and unpredictability have plagued the hiring market. Oversight bodies and policymakers are now asking tougher questions, not about whether reform was needed, but whether reform is delivering measurable results.

This report provides a snapshot of the security clearance landscape at the start of 2026, highlighting what has improved, what remains unresolved, and what employers and cleared professionals should anticipate next.

## TRUSTED WORKFORCE 2.0: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

Trusted Workforce 2.0 is no longer a future-state framework. It is the operating reality of the federal personnel security system. The core principles remain intact: reduce redundancy, enable mobility, and manage risk continuously rather than episodically.

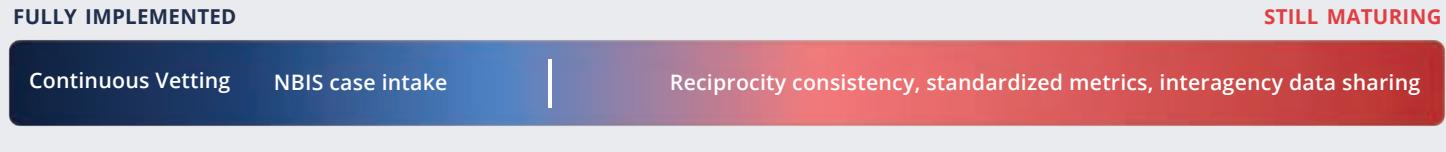
Key structural changes are now firmly in place:

-  Continuous Vetting has replaced periodic reinvestigations as the primary risk detection model.
-  NBIS serves as the enterprise system for investigations, case management, and information sharing.
-  Policy guidance increasingly emphasizes eligibility portability rather than agency-specific ownership.

However, implementation has varied significantly across agencies. Some organizations have embraced automation, reciprocity, and data-driven adjudication. Others continue to rely on legacy processes, manual reviews, and conservative risk interpretations that slow movement of cleared talent.

The result is a clearance system that is modern in architecture, but inconsistent in experience.

### Trusted Workforce 2.0: What's Implemented vs. What's Still Evolving



## CLEARANCE TIMELINESS: PROGRESS, QUESTIONS, AND DATA GAPS

Processing timelines remain one of the most closely watched elements of the clearance process. But when it comes to reality versus the metrics, mileage varies. Security clearance processing times have shown minimal progress over the past several years, and the past year of government shutdown and agency impacts has likely not created more stability in security clearance processing.

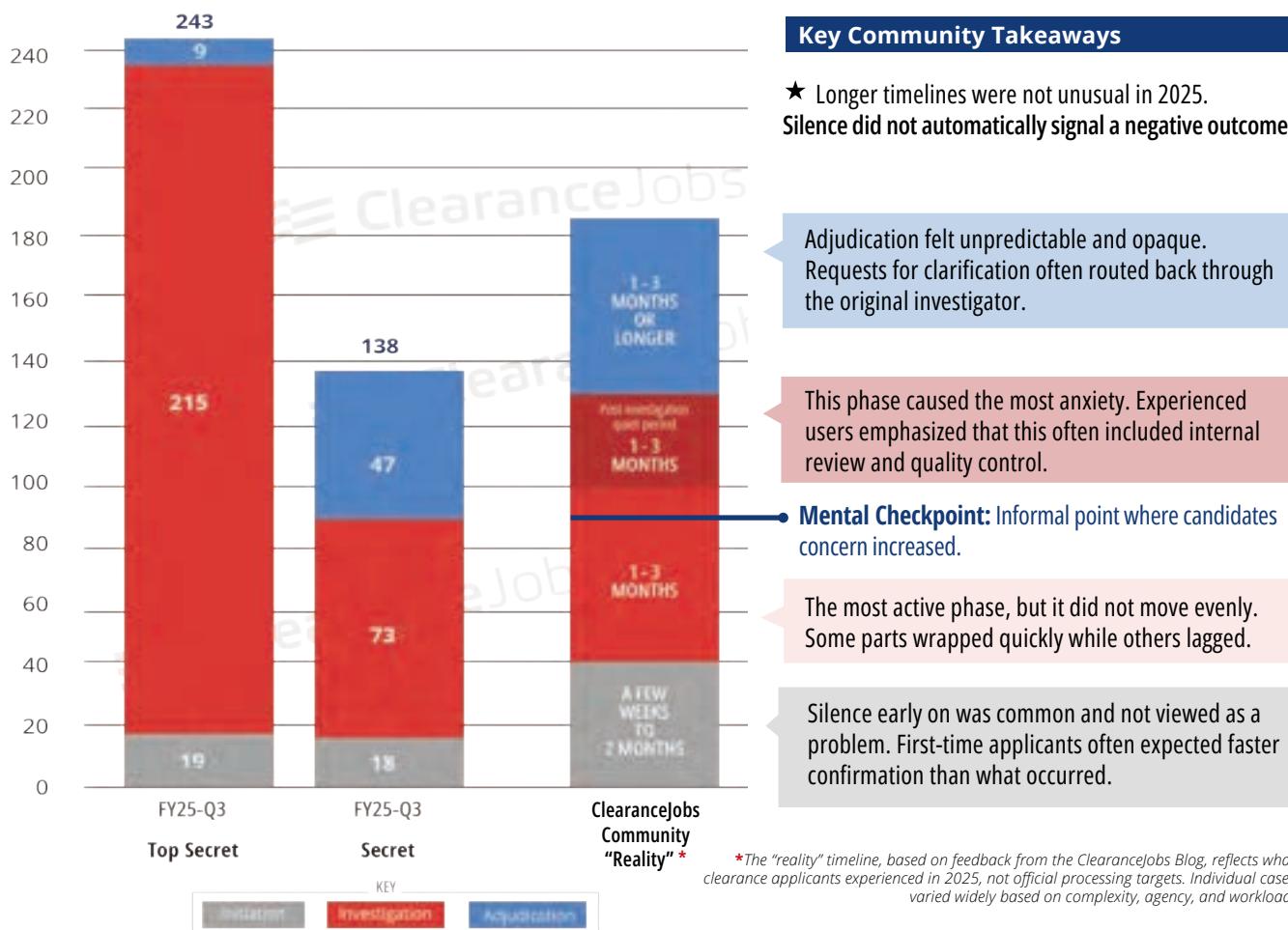
Oversight reviews have raised concerns about how current metrics are calculated, what cases are excluded, and how well reported timelines reflect real-world applicant experiences.

### THE FOCUS ON THE "FASTEST 90 PERCENT" OF CASES CONTINUES TO OBSCURE:



For applicants and employers alike, the practical takeaway remains unchanged: timelines vary widely, and individual case complexity matters more than headline averages.

## SECURITY CLEARANCE TIMELINES: TREND VS. REALITY



## CONTINUOUS VETTING: VISIBILITY WITHOUT UNIFORMITY

Continuous Vetting is the cornerstone of personnel security reform. Automated record checks and flag-based alerts now identify potential risk indicators in near-real time. But broader adoption has surfaced a new challenge: what happens after a flag appears.

Agencies differ in:



Thresholds for review



Response timelines



Communication with employers and cleared individuals

For cleared professionals, this can mean uncertainty, particularly when flagged information does not ultimately rise to adjudicative concern. For employers, inconsistent responses complicate workforce planning and contract performance.

CV has increased risk visibility. The next phase of reform must focus on predictability, proportionality, and transparency in how that information is used.

Education of the cleared workforce is essential. As CV rolls out into the non-sensitive Public Trust population, more questions arise as to what happens to those alerts, and how cleared employers can better track, engage, and inform their Public Trust population about self-reporting and other mitigating factors that used to only apply to the national security population.



## TOP CAUSES OF CLEARANCE DENIAL AND REVOCATION

As of January 1, the Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals (DOHA) had published summaries of 627 security clearance appeal decisions issued in 2025, reflecting a 25% decline in total appeals compared to the prior year. Financial issues once again accounted for more denials than all other adjudicative concerns combined and were most often upheld on appeal. Cases involving illegal drug use, primarily marijuana, remained consistent with levels seen over the past two years. These cases typically centered on failures to disclose use or stated intent to continue using substances legal under state law but prohibited federally. Appeal volumes across other adjudicative categories showed little change year over year.

## BREAKDOWN OF DENIALS BY ADJUDICATIVE GUIDELINES

Below is a breakdown by adjudicative category of the types of issues involved in the initial denial (Note- many cases involved multiple issues).

## TOP ISSUES THAT CAUSE SECURITY CLEARANCE DENIAL

Adjudicative Category	Number of Denied Cases		Adjudicative Category	Number of Denied Cases	
	2024	2025		2024	2025
<b>Guideline A:</b> Allegiance to the U.S.	0	0	<b>Guideline H:</b> Drug Involvement	208	217 ▲
<b>Guideline B:</b> Foreign Influence	46	44 ▼	<b>Guideline I:</b> Psychological Conditions	25	27 ▲
<b>Guideline C:</b> Foreign Preference	4	3 ▼	<b>Guideline J:</b> Criminal Conduct	112	106 ▼
<b>Guideline D:</b> Sexual Behavior	25	21 ▼	<b>Guideline K:</b> Handling Protected Information	7	5 ▼
<b>Guideline E:</b> Personal Conduct	196	210 ▲	<b>Guideline L:</b> Outside Activity	0	1 ▲
<b>Guideline F:</b> Financial Consideration	384	320 ▼	<b>Guideline M:</b> Use of IT System	10	12 ▲
<b>Guideline G:</b> Alcohol Consumption	59	36 ▼	<b>APPEALS DENIED ELIGIBILITY</b>		<b>548</b> <b>483</b>
			<b>APPEALS GRANTED ELIGIBILITY</b>		<b>171</b> <b>144</b>

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

## RECIPROCITY AND PORTABILITY: STILL A WORK IN PROGRESS

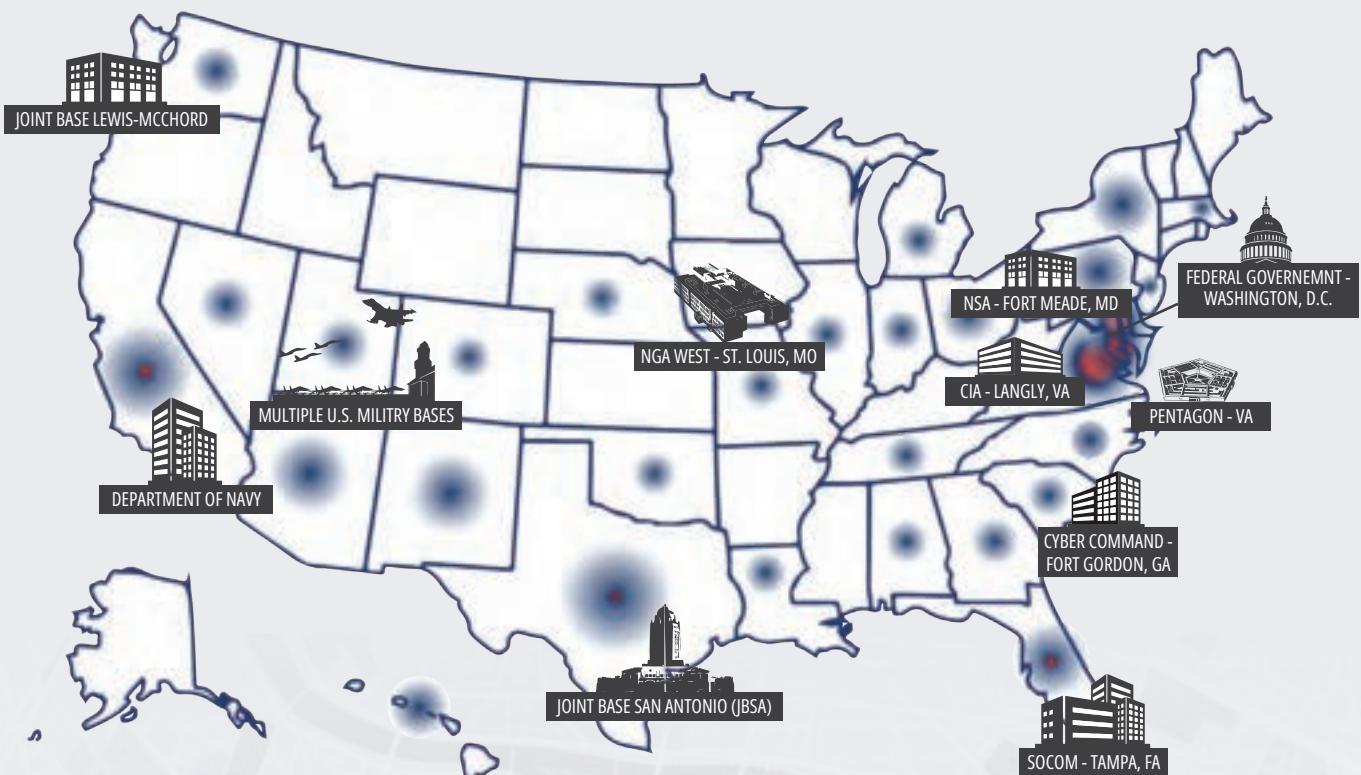
One of the central promises of Trusted Workforce 2.0 was improved mobility, the ability for cleared professionals to move between agencies and contracts without restarting the vetting process.

While policy guidance supports reciprocity, execution remains uneven. Differences in risk tolerance, mission sensitivity, and internal review standards continue to slow transfers, even when eligibility is valid and Continuous Vetting enrollment is current.

For employers, this friction leaves positions unfilled despite available cleared talent, extends hiring timelines unpredictably, and erodes candidate confidence in the clearance process.

For cleared professionals, it creates career stagnation, whether real or perceived, because when a job change comes with a clearance transfer, it may result in delayed or even rescinded employment opportunities.

## WHERE THE CLEARED POPULATION EXISTS



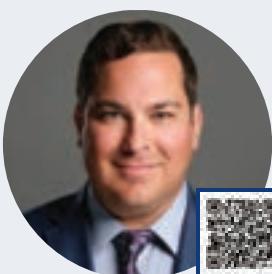
Data pulled from the 2024 Security Clearance Compensation Survey was administered online by ClearanceJobs from August 16, 2023 and December 20, 2023.



## A FOCUS FOR 2026: INDUSTRIAL SECURITY 2.0

Industrial security is a critical but often overlooked pillar of the security clearance process because it governs how cleared companies, facilities, systems, and people actually protect classified information once access is granted. While personnel vetting determines who is trusted, industrial security determines how that trust is safeguarded in practice through facility clearances, classified contracts, insider threat programs, information systems security, and compliance with the National Industrial Security Program Operating Manual (NISPOM). As national security work becomes more distributed, data-driven, and technologically complex, weaknesses in industrial security can undermine even the most rigorous individual vetting. Heading into 2026, industrial security appears increasingly ready for a Trusted Workforce 2.0-style overhaul, one that moves beyond periodic inspections and checklist compliance toward continuous risk management, greater use of data and automation, clearer accountability, and better alignment with modern workforce realities. Modernizing industrial security alongside personnel vetting would help reduce friction for compliant employers, improve transparency and consistency, and ensure that trust is maintained not just at the individual level, but across the entire cleared enterprise.

While it's unclear what industrial clearance reform could look like in the year to come, companies today have the data to start shoring up their security posture and making their company and national security overall, more secure.



BRETT MENCIN  
VP, ENTERPRISE VETTING & ANALYSIS  
AT XCELERATE SOLUTIONS

**"The clearance process is no longer just about getting people through the door. It is about how we manage trust over time in a workforce that is more mobile, more scrutinized, and more essential than ever. As Continuous Vetting expands and oversight intensifies, predictability and proportionality will define confidence in the system. Employers and cleared professionals alike are looking for clarity, not just speed, and 2026 will be a defining year in whether the system delivers."**

With heightened scrutiny on security processes, data integrity, and risk management, even routine compliance gaps are more likely to trigger follow-up actions or delays. Organizations that enter security reviews unprepared risk compounding existing hiring and retention challenges, while those with strong, proactive security programs will be better positioned to move talent quickly, maintain contract momentum, and support national security missions without interruption.

To help companies get ready for upcoming Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) security reviews, the agency identified the ten most common problem areas found during security inspections in Fiscal Year 2025. These issues are based on requirements in the National Industrial Security Program Operating Manual. Addressing them early can reduce findings during an inspection, strengthen your overall security program, and make the review process faster and less disruptive.

## TOP SECURITY ISSUES IN THE DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL BASE

	<b>1</b>	Information System Security Program
	<b>2</b>	Reporting to DCSA
	<b>3</b>	Self Inspections
	<b>4</b>	Defense Information System for Security (DISS) Management
	<b>5</b>	Insider Threat Training
	<b>6</b>	Refresher Training
	<b>7</b>	Initial Security Training
	<b>8</b>	NATO Security Requirements
	<b>9</b>	Safeguarding Classified Information
	<b>10</b>	Lack of Contractor Security Officials (SMO, FSO, ITPSO, and ISSM)

Source: <https://www.dcsa.mil/Portals/128/Documents/CTP/tools/251231%20VOI%20Newsletter.pdf>

## SECURITY FOR THE FUTURE:

Policy discussions increasingly emphasize that clearance reform is not simply a security issue: it is a workforce readiness issue with national security implications.

Congressional and oversight attention has moved beyond authorizing reform and is now focused on evaluating outcomes. Emerging areas of emphasis include the reliability and transparency of clearance metrics, oversight of NBIS performance and scalability, improved workforce access for critical skill areas, and greater accountability for how reciprocity policies are implemented across agencies.

## ABOUT US

For more than 20 years, ClearanceJobs has connected professionals with federal government security clearance and employers to fill the jobs that safeguard our nation. Our career community allows members to connect, engage, and explore opportunities to find a “best fit” match.



**1,705,330**  
Registered Candidates



**121,036**  
Monthly Connections



**60,019**  
Monthly Job Listings



**2,063**  
Hiring Companies



**412,459**  
Searchable Profiles



**14,762**  
New Monthly Candidates



**9,855**  
Active Recruiters



**95**  
Networking Groups

**HAVE MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS?  
VISIT OUR [SECURITY CLEARANCE FAQ](#).**

## MISSION DRIVEN RESULTS

At Xcelerate, we enhance national security by identifying and analyzing threats through expert personnel and entity vetting solutions. As Trusted Workforce 2.0 transforms personnel security, we help agencies adapt by offering scalable vetting operations, advanced identity resolution, and insider threat detection.

Our nationwide team conducts thorough background investigations and provides intelligence analysis, enabling informed decision-making and strengthening security across federal operations. We're committed to making America safer by safeguarding personnel, facilities, and critical information.

[xceleratesolutions.com](http://xceleratesolutions.com)

**XCELERATE**  
SOLUTIONS



# A COMMUNITY FOR CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN NATIONAL SECURITY

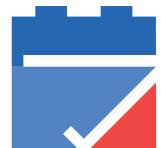
ClearanceJobs is your all-in-one recruiting solution. Much like a CRM, our unique system lets you target top candidate leads, converting cool passives to active candidates ready to make a move—to your company.

## END-TO-END CLEARED HIRING SOLUTIONS



### RECRUITMENT SOLUTIONS

- Search, directly engage, and easily work cleared candidates through a pipeline.
- Convert passives to active potential hires.



### CAREER EVENTS

- Reduce your cost per hire with real-time conversations.
- Choose from in-person or virtual, public or private events.



### STAFFING SOLUTIONS

- We'll source cleared candidates for contract, contract-to-hire, and permanent placement roles.
- Save time and free up your bandwidth, all that's left to do is interview and hire.



### EMPLOYER BRANDING

- Increase brand awareness to gain cleared candidate trust.
- Amplify your hiring messages using targeted messaging, site advertising and sponsored content.

INTRODUCING



AgileATS is purpose-built for the GovCon community where security, compliance, and speed aren't optional, they're mission-critical.

LEARN MORE

## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Connect with a ClearanceJobs Recruiting Specialist today at 1.866.302.7264  
or visit our website at [www.clearancejobs.com](http://www.clearancejobs.com)