



# THE CLEARANCE PROCESS KEEPS HITTING SNOOZE: A GROUNDHOG DAY REALITY CHECK



Every February 2nd, Punxsutawney Phil emerges to tell us whether we're in for six more weeks of winter. For cleared professionals and employers, 2026 feels a bit like that moment, except the question isn't winter versus spring. It's whether *this* year will finally bring predictability to the security clearance process...or whether we'll wake up to the same song playing again.

Progress is real, but so is security clearance *déjà vu*.

According to the [State of the Security Clearance Process: 1H 2026](#), the system has entered a familiar but increasingly high-stakes phase: modernized in theory, uneven in execution, and under intense pressure from workforce realities

## Trusted Workforce 2.0: The Movie Is No Longer a Trailer

Trusted Workforce 2.0 is no longer a future-state promise or a policy white paper gathering dust. It is the operating reality of the federal personnel security system.

Key reforms are firmly in place:

- **Continuous Vetting (CV)** has replaced periodic reinvestigations.
- **NBIS** serves as the enterprise backbone for investigations and case management.
- Policy guidance increasingly emphasizes **portability and reciprocity** over agency ownership.

On paper, this is the modernization the clearance community has been asking for: less redundancy, more mobility, and risk managed continuously instead of every five or ten years. But any fan of the movie *Groundhog Day* knows, just because the sun rises doesn't mean the day plays out differently.

Implementation still varies widely across agencies. Some have embraced automation and data-driven adjudication. Others remain anchored to legacy workflows, manual reviews, and conservative interpretations of risk. The result is a system that is technically modern, but experientially inconsistent. (more)

## Clearance Timelines: Same Clock, New Math

If there's one part of the clearance process that truly feels like it's on repeat, it's processing timelines. Official metrics suggest modest progress. Real-world experiences suggest something closer to: "*It depends.*"

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# SECURE RESULTS. **DELIVERED.**

Oversight bodies have raised concerns about how timelines are calculated, what cases are excluded, how outliers are treated, and whether reported averages reflect actual applicant experiences. The continued focus on the “fastest 90 percent” of cases obscures the very scenarios that cause the most disruption, such as delayed adjudications and stalls in the ‘transfer of trust’ (reciprocity) process.

For applicants and employers, the takeaway hasn’t changed much over the past few years: case complexity matters more than headline averages, and predictability remains elusive. Consistent with our friend the Groundhog emerging from his burrow, many cleared professionals experience extended quiet phases, particularly at the beginning, which are then followed by sudden bursts of activity that are hard to understand.

## **Reciprocity and Portability: Still Waiting for the Weather to Change**

One of the central promises of Trusted Workforce 2.0 was improved mobility, which means cleared professionals can move between agencies and contracts without starting over. Policy supports this. Reality...sometimes does not.

Differences in mission sensitivity, internal risk tolerance, and review standards continue to slow transfers, even when eligibility is valid, and Continuous Vetting enrollment is current. For employers, this means unfilled positions despite available talent. For cleared professionals, it can mean stalled careers or rescinded offers. It’s less “seamless portability” and more “your clearance may vary.”

## **Final Scene: Will 2026 Be the Year the Movie Changes?**

The clearance process in 2026 isn’t stuck, but it’s not fully unstuck either. Continuous Vetting is here. NBIS is operational. Reform is no longer theoretical. But predictability, proportionality, and transparency are still catching up. The clearance process is no longer just about getting people through the door; it’s about managing trust over time in a workforce that is more mobile, more scrutinized, and more essential than ever.

Personnel vetting is in the midst of a major overhaul. The implementation of Trusted Workforce 2.0 isn’t optional—it’s essential to achieving the efficiency this mission demands. Breaking personnel vetting out of its Groundhog Day loop and delivering real operational gains may be the epiphany needed to finally start the day with a new song and a fresh forecast.

Will 2026 finally be the year??

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