

Proposed Rules

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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains notices to the public of the proposed issuance of rules and regulations. The purpose of these notices is to give interested persons an opportunity to participate in the rule making prior to the adoption of the final rules.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Office of the Secretary

6 CFR Part 5

[Docket No. DHS-2011-0088]

Privacy Act of 1974: Implementation of Exemptions; Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services-016 Electronic Immigration System-3 Automated Background Functions System of Records

AGENCY: Privacy Office, DHS.

ACTION: Notice of proposed rulemaking.

SUMMARY: The Department of Homeland Security is giving concurrent notice of a newly established system of records pursuant to the Privacy Act of 1974 for the "Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services-016 Electronic Immigration System-3 Automated Background Functions System of Records" and this proposed rulemaking. In this proposed rulemaking, the Department proposes to exempt portions of the system of records from one or more provisions of the Privacy Act because of criminal, civil, and administrative enforcement requirements.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before October 31, 2011.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by docket number DHS-2011-0088, by one of the following methods:

- *Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:* <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

- *Fax:* 703-483-2999.

- *Mail:* Mary Ellen Callahan, Chief Privacy Officer, Privacy Office, Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC 20528.

- *Instructions:* All submissions received must include the agency name and docket number for this rulemaking. All comments received will be posted without change to <http://www.regulations.gov>, including any personal information provided.

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- *Docket:* For access to the docket to read background documents or comments received go to <http://www.regulations.gov>.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For general questions please contact: Donald K. Hawkins (202-272-8000), Privacy Officer, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20529. For privacy issues please contact: Mary Ellen Callahan (703-235-0780), Chief Privacy Officer, Privacy Office, Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC 20528.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

In accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 552a, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) proposes to establish a new DHS system of records titled, "DHS/USCIS-016 Electronic Immigration System-3 Automated Background Functions System of Records." DHS/USCIS is creating a new electronic environment known as the Electronic Immigration System (USCIS ELIS). USCIS ELIS allows individuals requesting a USCIS benefit to register online and submit certain benefit requests through the online system. This system will improve customer service; increase efficiency for processing benefits; better identify potential national security concerns, criminality, and fraud; and create improved access controls and better auditing capabilities.

DHS and USCIS are promulgating the regulation "Immigration Benefits Business Transformation, Increment I" (August 29, 2011, 76 FR 53764) to make it possible for USCIS to transition to an electronic environment. This regulation will assist USCIS in the transformation of its operations by removing references and processes that inhibit the use of

electronic systems or constrain USCIS's ability to respond to changing workloads, priorities, or statutory requirements.

Applicants and petitioners (Applicants); co-applicants, beneficiaries, derivatives, dependents, or other persons on whose behalf a benefit request is made or whose immigration status may be derived because of a relationship to the Applicant (Co-Applicants); and their attorneys and representatives accredited by the Board of Immigration Appeals (Representatives) may create individualized online accounts. These online accounts help Applicants and their Representatives file for benefits, track the status of open benefit requests, schedule appointments, change their addresses and contact information, and receive notices and notifications regarding their cases. Through USCIS ELIS, individuals may submit additional information and/or evidence electronically. Once an individual provides biographic information in one benefit request, USCIS ELIS uses that information to pre-populate any future benefit requests filed by the same individual. This eases the burden on an individual so he or she does not have to repeatedly type in the same information and decreases the opportunity for error.

USCIS collects this information primarily for the benefit decision-making process, to detect duplicate and related accounts, identify potential national security concerns, criminality, and fraud. In essence, Electronic Immigration System-3 Automated Background Functions (USCIS ELIS Automated Background Functions) is used to assist USCIS personnel in verifying the data submitted by the Applicant or Representative, to ensure that any duplicate accounts will be merged, and that background check results, indicating threats to the national security, public safety criminality, or fraud will be appropriately considered in adjudicating the benefit request.

DHS is claiming exemptions from certain requirements of the Privacy Act for DHS/USCIS-016 Electronic Immigration System-3 Automated Background Functions System of Records. Some information in Electronic Immigration System-3 Automated Background Functions (USCIS ELIS Automated Background Functions)

relates to official DHS national security, law enforcement, and immigration activities. The exemptions are required to preclude subjects from compromising an ongoing law enforcement, national security or fraud investigation; to avoid disclosure of investigative techniques; to protect the identities and physical safety of confidential informants and law enforcement personnel; and to ensure DHS's ability to obtain information from third parties and other sources.

This system is exempted from the following provisions of the Privacy Act pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(2); 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3); (d); (e)(1), (e)(4)(G), (e)(4)(H), (e)(4)(I); and (f). Additionally, many of the functions in this system require retrieving records from law enforcement systems. Where a record received from another system has been exempted in that source system under 5 U.S.C. 552a(j)(2), DHS will claim the same exemptions for those records that are claimed for the original primary systems of records from which they originated and claims any additional exemptions in accordance with this rule.

The exemptions proposed here are standard for agencies where the information may contain investigatory materials compiled for law enforcement purposes. These exemptions are exercised by executive federal agencies. In appropriate circumstances, where compliance would not appear to interfere with or adversely affect the overall law enforcement process, the applicable exemptions may be waived on a case-by-case basis.

A notice of system of records for DHS/USCIS-016 Electronic Immigration System-3 Automated Background Functions System of Records is also published in this issue of the **Federal Register**.

II. Privacy Act

The Privacy Act allows government agencies to exempt certain records from the access and amendment provisions. If an agency claims an exemption, however, it must issue a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to make clear to the public the reasons why a particular exemption is claimed.

List of Subjects in 6 CFR Part 5

Freedom of information; Privacy.

For the reasons stated in the preamble, DHS proposes to amend Chapter I of Title 6, Code of Federal Regulations, as follows:

PART 5—DISCLOSURE OF RECORDS AND INFORMATION

1. The authority citation for part 5 continues to read as follows:

Authority: Pub. L. 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135; (6 U.S.C. 101 *et seq.*); 5 U.S.C. 301. Subpart A also issued under 5 U.S.C. 552. Subpart B also issued under 5 U.S.C. 552a.

2. Add at the end of Appendix C to Part 5, the following new paragraph "62":

Appendix C to Part 5—DHS Systems of Records Exempt From the Privacy Act

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62. The DHS/USCIS-016 Electronic Immigration System-3 Automated Background Functions System of Records consists of electronic and paper records and will be used by DHS and its components. The DHS/USCIS-016 Electronic Immigration System-3 Automated Background Functions System of Records is a repository of information held by USCIS to serve its mission of processing immigration benefits. This system also supports certain other DHS programs whose functions include, but are not limited to, the enforcement of civil and criminal laws; investigations, inquiries, and proceedings thereunder; and national security and intelligence activities. The DHS/USCIS-016 Electronic Immigration System-3 Automated Background Functions System of Records contains information that is collected by, on behalf of, in support of, or in cooperation with DHS and its components and may contain personally identifiable information collected by other federal, state, local, tribal, foreign, or international government agencies. This system is exempted from the following provisions of the Privacy Act pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(2); 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3); (d); (e)(1), (e)(4)(G), (e)(4)(H), (e)(4)(I); and (f). Additionally, many of the functions in this system require retrieving records from law enforcement systems. Where a record received from another system has been exempted in that source system under 5 U.S.C. 552a(j)(2), DHS will claim the same exemptions for those records that are claimed for the original primary systems of records from which they originated and claims any additional exemptions in accordance with this rule. Exemptions from these particular subsections are justified, on a case-by-case basis determined at the time a request is made, for the following reasons:

(a) From subsection (c)(3) (Accounting for Disclosures) because release of the accounting of disclosures could alert the subject of an investigation of an actual or potential criminal, civil, or regulatory violation to the existence of that investigation and reveal investigative interest on the part of DHS as well as the recipient agency. Disclosure of the accounting would therefore present a serious impediment to law enforcement efforts and/or efforts to preserve national security. Disclosure of the accounting would also permit the individual who is the subject of a record to impede the investigation, to tamper with witnesses or

evidence, and to avoid detection or apprehension, which would undermine the entire investigative process.

(b) From subsection (d) (Access to Records) because access to the records contained in this system of records could inform the subject of an investigation of an actual or potential criminal, civil, or regulatory violation to the existence of that investigation and/or reveal investigative interest on the part of DHS or another agency. Access to the records could permit the individual who is the subject of a record to impede the investigation, to tamper with witnesses or evidence, and to avoid detection or apprehension. Amendment of the records could interfere with ongoing investigations and law enforcement activities and would impose an unreasonable administrative burden by requiring investigations to be continually reinvestigated. In addition, permitting access and amendment to such information could disclose security-sensitive information that could be detrimental to homeland security.

(c) From subsection (e)(1) (Relevancy and Necessity of Information) because in the course of investigations into potential violations of federal law, the accuracy of information obtained or introduced occasionally may be unclear, or the information may not be strictly relevant or necessary to a specific investigation. In the interests of effective law enforcement, it is appropriate to retain all information that may aid in establishing patterns of unlawful activity.

(d) From subsections (e)(4)(G), (e)(4)(H), and (e)(4)(I) (Agency Requirements) and (f) (Agency Rules), because portions of this system are exempt from the individual access provisions of subsection (d) for the reasons noted above, and therefore DHS is not required to establish requirements, rules, or procedures with respect to such access. Providing notice to individuals with respect to existence of records pertaining to them in the system of records, or otherwise setting up procedures pursuant to which individuals may access and view records pertaining to themselves in the system, would undermine investigative efforts and reveal the identities of witnesses, and potential witnesses, and confidential informants.

Dated: September 15, 2011.

Mary Ellen Callahan,
Chief Privacy Officer, Department of
Homeland Security.

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