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IMMIGRATION MANAGEMENT: Actions
Being Taken, But Problems Remain

Statement of
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Before the
Subcommittee on Immigration and
Refugee Affairs
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate



IMMIGRATION MANAGEMENT: ACTIONS BEING
TAKEN, BUT PROBLEMS REMAIN

SUMMARY OF STATEMENT BY
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The INS Commissioner faces difficult challenges carrying out a myriad of programs that not only attempt to prevent illegal entry into the United States, but also to provide service to individuals seeking immigration benefits to which they may be legally entitled.

GAO found that over the past decade weak management systems and inconsistent leadership have allowed serious problems at INS to go unresolved. Without coherent overall direction and basic management reforms, INS has been unable to effectively address changing enforcement responsibilities and longstanding service delivery problems. In its management reports, GAO noted that INS needed to take a number of short- and long-term actions to be able to effectively carry out its role of implementing the nation's immigration policy.

Problems at INS did not occur overnight, and solving them will require obtaining people with the right skills to fill new key positions and a sustained commitment from both INS and the Department of Justice. INS recognizes this and has initiated a number of actions to address GAO's recommendations by starting to systematically improve its basic management framework. A recently approved reorganization and steps to develop a total quality management framework are positive actions that should help posture the agency to move forward in confronting its critical problems. Yet challenges remain. For example, overlaps in the enforcement program continue and progress in addressing financial management weaknesses has been slow.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss some of the actions the Department of Justice and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) have taken to address the leadership and management problems that we and others have reported. Since September 1990, we have issued three reports that outline serious problems at INS. Two reports, issued in January 1991, addressed the financial and overall management reforms needed. The other report, issued in September 1990, focused on the need for information management improvements.¹

INS faces many challenges as it carries out its vital mission in a time of unprecedented growth and change. Balancing both INS' enforcement and service roles is difficult under any circumstances. But, INS' task is compounded by a lack of consensus regarding immigration policy, the unpredictable nature of changing world conditions, the persistent negative perceptions-- both internally and externally--of INS' abilities, and the difficulty of coordinating with a large number of government agencies and interest groups.

¹Immigration Management: Strong Leadership and Management Reforms Needed to Address Serious Problems (GAO/GGD-91-28, Jan. 23, 1991); Financial Management: INS Lacks Accountability and Controls Over Its Resources (GAO/AFMD-91-20, Jan. 24, 1991); and Information Management: Immigration and Naturalization Service Lacks Ready Access to Essential Data, (GAO/IMTEC-90-75, Sep. 27, 1990).

To help with these challenges, Congress has nearly doubled INS' budget and increased its staff by about 50 percent since 1986. However, we reported that over the past decade weak management systems and inconsistent leadership have allowed serious problems to go unresolved. Without coherent overall direction and basic management reforms, INS has been unable to effectively address changing enforcement responsibilities and longstanding service delivery problems. We said that INS needed to take a number of short- and long-term actions to be able to effectively carry out its role of implementing the nation's immigration policy.

In response, Justice and INS have initiated a number of actions. For example, INS has (1) implemented models for the Border Patrol and the adjudication program to better allocate staff based on workload, (2) requested increased staffing for detention centers, (3) initiated a management information planning process to help ensure more coordinated system development, and (4) initiated programs to address strategic planning weaknesses using a total quality management framework.

Several of INS' problems had their roots in its decentralized organizational structure, which caused overlapping and uncoordinated programs and diffused accountability. INS took a major step to address this segmented management environment by revising its organizational structure. The recently approved reorganization centralized more control in INS headquarters and

created several new executive positions to assist the Commissioner. A key feature of the reorganization is the reduced autonomy of INS' regions. Regional offices will now primarily perform administrative functions with little control over programs and policy setting. If effectively implemented, this structure should promote increased uniformity of program operations, make it easier to effectively allocate and balance resources to address changing workloads, and increase accountability of field managers to INS headquarters.

Some benefits of this increased centralization are already occurring. For example, adjudication program managers have shifted application processing from the backlogged Southern Region to the Northern Region. This has helped to reduce the Southern Region backlogs by 75 percent without adversely affecting the Northern Region. Also, headquarters financial management officials have begun to use their increased authority to redistribute the accounting workload among regional offices to increase standardization and productivity.

But, while the reorganization addressed the problem of autonomous regions, it did not deal with the geographic and programmatic fragmentation in INS' enforcement program. In our overall management report, we said that INS' dual enforcement structure coupled with the unclear division of enforcement responsibilities between the Border Patrol and the Investigations Division had

caused program overlap and ineffective use of personnel.

Although INS is beginning to deal with some of the more serious enforcement problems, such as proposing to close interior Border Patrol stations, it has not confronted one of the basic causes of fragmentation--namely the bifurcated enforcement structure. We continue to believe that INS could benefit by consolidating all field enforcement functions, including Border Patrol and District Enforcement, under a revised field structure that would centralize all enforcement functions under a single official within each geographic area.

INS officials have also initiated some key actions to address the financial management system problems. A new Executive Associate Commissioner for Management, who has a strong background in financial management, was recently appointed. In addition, INS has proposed a reprogramming action to fund 29 additional budget and accounting positions and is in the process of filling a new senior executive financial management position which was created by the reorganization. Additional actions include (1) the initiation of joint audits with the Customs Service to help ensure that inspection fees owed are collected and (2) the enactment of a debt management program to improve the collection of bonds and other receivables.

But other financial management progress has been slow. The modification of Justice's Financial Management Information System

(FMIS) for use by INS continues to be delayed. For example, the budget module--which was scheduled for implementation in January 1991--isn't expected to be fully operational until October 1991. A key reason for the delay was the lack of early input by INS field managers into system requirements. Other basic problems remain, including continued inconsistent timing of data entry into INS' primary accounting system by regional offices, and the lack of written procedures to ensure the proper deposit of examination fee cash receipts by INS field personnel.

In conclusion, we believe that both Justice and INS have begun to move systematically to improve INS' management framework. But, INS is at the beginning of this effort. The improved framework should put the agency in a position to confront its management problems. But those problems did not occur overnight, and solving them will require obtaining people with the right skills to fill the new key positions and a sustained commitment from both INS and Justice.

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This concludes my remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have at this time.

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