



Highlights of [GAO-05-477](#), a report to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

# STATE DEPARTMENT

## Improvements Needed to Strengthen U.S. Passport Fraud Detection Efforts

### Why GAO Did This Study

Maintaining the integrity of the U.S. passport is essential to the State Department's efforts to protect U.S. citizens from terrorists, criminals, and others. State issued about 8.8 million passports in fiscal year 2004. During the same year, State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security arrested about 500 individuals for passport fraud, and about 300 persons were convicted. Passport fraud is often intended to facilitate other crimes, including illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and alien smuggling. GAO examined (1) how passport fraud is committed, (2) what key fraud detection challenges State faces, and (3) what effect new passport examiner performance standards could have on fraud detection.

### What GAO Recommends

This report makes six recommendations to the Secretary of State to consider ways to improve interagency information sharing, establish a centralized and up-to-date fraud prevention library, consider augmenting fraud prevention staffing, assess the extent to which interoffice workload transfers may hinder fraud prevention, and strengthen fraud prevention training and oversight. State generally concurred with our recommendations and indicated that it has begun taking steps to implement most of them.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-477](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-477).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4128 or [fordj@gao.gov](mailto:fordj@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

Using the stolen identities of U.S. citizens is the primary method of those fraudulently applying for U.S. passports. False claims of lost, stolen, or damaged passports and child substitution are among the other tactics used. Fraudulently obtained passports can help criminals conceal their activities and travel with less scrutiny. Concerns exist that they could also be used to help facilitate terrorism.

State faces a number of challenges to its passport fraud detection efforts, and these challenges make it more difficult to protect U.S. citizens from terrorists, criminals, and others. Information on U.S. citizens listed in the federal government's consolidated terrorist watch list is not systematically provided to State. Moreover, State does not routinely obtain from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) the names of other individuals wanted by federal and state law enforcement authorities. We tested the names of 67 federal and state fugitives and found that 37, over half, were not in State's Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS) database for passports. One of those not included was on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. State does not maintain a centralized and up-to-date fraud prevention library, hindering information sharing within State. Fraud prevention staffing reductions and interoffice workload transfers resulted in fewer fraud referrals at some offices, and insufficient training, oversight, and investigative resources also hinder fraud detection efforts.

Any effect that new passport examiner performance standards may have on State's fraud detection efforts is unclear because State continues to adjust the standards. State began implementing the new standards in January 2004 to make work processes and performance expectations more uniform nationwide. Passport examiner union representatives expressed concern that new numerical production quotas may require examiners to "shortcut" fraud detection efforts. However, in response to union and examiner concerns, State eased the production standards during 2004 and made a number of other modifications and compromises.

**Crimes Suspected of 37 Federal and State Fugitives Not in CLASS Who Were Included in Our Test**

Type of crime	Federal fugitives	State fugitives
Murder	5	4
Felonious assault and related acts	2	7
Child sex offenses	4	1
Drug trafficking	3	
Attempted murder	1	1
Bombings	1	
Child kidnapping		1
Other crimes	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>17</b>

Sources: State Department and other federal agencies.