

GAO

Briefing Report to the Chairman,  
Legislation and National Security  
Subcommittee, Committee on  
Government Operations, House of  
Representatives

June 1988

STATE  
DEPARTMENT

Controlling Access to  
Headquarters Facilities



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United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and  
International Affairs Division

B-231229

June 29, 1988

The Honorable Jack Brooks  
Chairman, Legislation and  
National Security Subcommittee  
Committee on Government Operations  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

During our ongoing review of State Department's security investigation practices, which is being performed at your request, we noted that while State was making significant upgrades in security at its Washington headquarters and annexes, it had issued about 3,500 building passes to individuals for other than official business. The Department issued those passes to retirees, spouses, and adult dependents of State employees and to Navy Medical Command personnel who wanted to eat lunch in the State Department cafeteria. Consequently, we evaluated the Department of State's practices for issuing building passes.

In a November 12, 1987, letter, we presented our concerns to the Under Secretary of State for Management. We informed him that building passes

- were being issued without being subject to formal Department policy or criteria,
- were being provided for the personal convenience of nonemployees,
- were expensive to issue because they involved a background security check, and
- might unnecessarily increase the possibility of a breakdown in security.

On April 25, 1988, the Under Secretary of State for Management advised us that he had completed reviewing State's building pass program and had approved several modifications. He stated that (1) under a new policy, the Department is no

longer issuing building passes to retired employees or members of the Navy Medical Command; (2) family member passes are being restricted to spouses of employees, and their access is being restricted to normal business hours; and (3) State would be publishing its eligibility requirements for building passes.

NO FORMAL BASIS FOR GRANTING PASSES

At the time of our review the Department had not issued formal policies, procedures, or criteria concerning eligibility requirements for obtaining long-term use of State Department building passes. These passes normally provide access for 3 to 5 years. Officials from State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security advised us that, when they received a letter from a State Department office or another U.S. government agency requesting a building pass for an individual without a current security clearance on file with the Department, they conducted a National Agency Check.<sup>1</sup> If they found no problem they issued a pass. The State Department left the determination of need to the requesting officials; it provided no guidelines. State did not have formal eligibility requirements for spouses or adult sons and daughters of employees. At the time of our review, family members could obtain passes for 24-hour-a-day access to the main State Department building or any of its annexes and authority to escort others into the facilities with the sponsorship of a spouse or parent.

Officials from State's Diplomatic Security Bureau told us they believed that, for better access control, long-term building passes should not be granted to anyone who was not expected to enter the facilities on official business at least 8 days a month over an extended period of time. However, this was not a Department requirement. Although actual use could not be measured, these security officials believed that most retirees and family members would not meet this expectation.

In April 1988, the Under Secretary advised us that criteria concerning eligibility requirements for building passes would be published in the new Diplomatic Security Foreign Affairs Manual.

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<sup>1</sup>A National Agency Check consists of checking the results of previous background investigations with the Office of Personnel Management, obtaining the subject's fingerprints, and checking for past criminal activity with the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

RATIONALE FOR PROVIDING BUILDING PASSES

At the time of our review, representatives from the Foreign Service Association and officials from the Department's Family Liaison Office advised us that the State Department had issued and should continue to issue building passes to retirees and family members for the convenience of these individuals and to foster a greater sense of esprit de corps among employees, retirees, and family members. They believed that individuals should have the passes to obtain easy access to State's facilities to keep medical appointments; to use the credit union, banking facilities, or recreation association store; and to visit family members or former colleagues.

Diplomatic Security officials advised us, however, that family members could obtain access to the facilities for periodic visits without having passes that grant 24-hour-a-day access or escort authority. For example, an individual could obtain a temporary visitor's pass from the receptionist at the entrance or be precleared and placed on a visitors' list for medical appointments or special functions. Moreover, officials pointed out to us that the banking, credit union, and recreation association facilities in the building were intended for the convenience of current employees; similar services were available to others elsewhere.

Since the 1970s, the Department has routinely issued building passes to personnel from the Navy Medical Command located nearby to allow them access to the State cafeteria. Diplomatic Security officials told us that about 500 State building passes had been issued to Command personnel. However, only 375 military and civilian employees were stationed at the Navy Medical Command facility, according to the Command's Public Affairs Office. Diplomatic Security officials said the difference was probably because the Navy personnel did not always turn in their passes when they were reassigned or the passes might have been lost or stolen. Diplomatic Security officials stated that because other eating facilities are available in the vicinity the need for Navy personnel to use State's cafeteria was reduced.

In April 1988, the Under Secretary responded as follows:

-- Employees' spouses are provided building passes to facilitate their conducting official business in conjunction with assignments abroad, for example, to arrange for the shipment/storage of household effects, visit the Department's Overseas Briefing Center, and undergo medical clearance procedures. The passes also contribute to improved morale for employees and their spouses, who, although they may not receive remuneration,

represent the U.S. government abroad and share the hardships of employees' overseas assignments. In a similar vein, the Department considers it important for the morale of employees to realize that when they retire the Department will not sever its connection with them. State now believes, however, that this support for retirees need not extend to the granting of building passes.

- Under newly established policy, family member building passes do not authorize 24-hour unrestricted access to the building.
- Family members of employees who work in the building for agencies other than State are able to obtain building passes on an exception basis only.
- The Department has concluded that the long-standing practice of granting building passes to Navy Medical Command personnel is no longer warranted. Navy Medical Command personnel will no longer be routinely issued building passes to access State facilities. Navy Medical Command personnel must now meet established criteria for issuance of building passes that is based on frequency of access to conduct official business within the State building.
- Frequency of entry into a State building is not a criterion for issuing a building pass to a family member. The Department relies on its employees to turn in family member building passes when they are no longer needed.

#### COST TO ISSUE BUILDING PASSES

According to Diplomatic Security officials, the physical pass itself costs nearly \$25 to issue. At this cost, the price of 3,500 passes is \$87,500. However, since the Department does a security check before issuing most passes, costs are greatly increased. We were told that it takes from 30 to 90 days to process a nonemployee building pass. The Diplomatic Security Bureau has not estimated the total cost of providing such passes, but processing a request for a nonemployee pass takes an average of 4 to 6 hours of government staff time. The staff must also periodically renew each pass and perform a security update. Therefore, the cost is recurring.

#### SECURITY CONCERNS

Because of the sensitive nature of its mission, the State Department is spending millions of dollars to upgrade security at its Washington headquarters and annexes, including \$2.3 million to install an improved access control

system. The Department intends to rely heavily on building passes to regulate and control entry.

Security concerns take different forms. Possession of building passes by retirees and family members can result in unexpected and unwanted visits to offices handling classified information. In cases of retirees and family members using their building passes only as a personal convenience on an infrequent basis, a lost pass may go undetected and unreported, increasing the risk that it could be used by others for unintended purposes. It should also be noted that a State Department building pass is recognized as sufficient identification to obtain access to other federal buildings.

In April 1988, the Under Secretary advised us that, having considered the Department's overall budget constraints and increased security concerns, he believes that the benefits to the government of providing building passes to family members outweigh the costs. Family member passes are now restricted to spouses, many of whom have already been fully investigated in conjunction with temporary employment in a critical-sensitive position at a U.S. diplomatic mission abroad or elsewhere in the United States, which also reduces the cost of issuing the pass.

#### CONCLUSIONS

We believe that the Department's decisions to clarify the eligibility requirements for building passes, reduce the number of passes issued to nonfederal employees, and restrict the access of employees' spouses to normal business hours should help enhance State's efforts to improve building access controls and reduce costs.

#### OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this aspect of our overall review of State Department's security investigation practices was to determine the adequacy of State's policies and procedures in granting building passes to non-State Department employees, the associated costs, and security considerations. Our work was conducted primarily at Department of State headquarters, Washington, D.C. We also interviewed representatives from the American Foreign Affairs Association and the Navy Medical Command Public Information Office. Our review was conducted from November 1987 to April 1988 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. As you requested, we

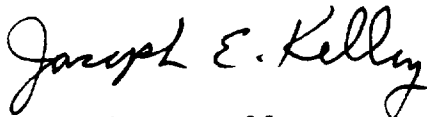
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did not ask the Department of State to provide official comments on a draft of this report.

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As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this briefing report until 30 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to the Secretary of State and other interested parties. If we can be of further assistance, please call me on 275-4128.

Sincerely yours,



Joseph E. Kelley  
Associate Director

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