

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–2021–0042]

Privacy Act of 1974: Implementation of Exemptions; U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General Investigative Records System of Records

AGENCY: Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

ACTION: Notice of proposed rulemaking.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is giving concurrent notice of an updated and reissued system of records pursuant to the Privacy Act of 1974 for the “DHS/ Office of Inspector General (OIG)-002 Investigative Records 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 November 22, 2021.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by docket number DHS–2021–0042, by one of the following methods:

- *Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:* <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- *Fax:* 202–343–4010.
- *Mail:* Lynn Parker Dupree, Chief Privacy Officer, Privacy Office, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC 20528.

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

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

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For general and privacy questions, please contact: Lynn Parker Dupree, (202) 343–1717, Chief Privacy Officer, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC 20528–0655.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

In accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Office of Inspector General (OIG), is modifying and reissuing this system of records notice. DHS OIG is responsible for a wide range of oversight functions, including to initiate, conduct, supervise, and coordinate audits, investigations, inspections, and other reviews relating to the programs and operations of DHS. DHS OIG promotes economy, efficiency, and effectiveness within DHS and prevents, detects, and investigates employee corruption, fraud, waste, and abuse in its programs and operations. DHS OIG is responsible for investigating allegations of criminal, civil, and administrative misconduct involving DHS employees, contractors, grantees, and DHS programs and activities. These investigations can result in criminal prosecutions, fines, civil monetary penalties, and administrative sanctions. While DHS OIG is operationally a part of DHS, it operates independently of DHS and all offices within it.

The DHS/OIG–002 Investigative Records System of Records assists DHS OIG with receiving and processing allegations of misconduct, including violations of criminal and civil laws, as well as administrative policies and regulations pertaining to DHS employees, contractors, grantees, and other individuals and entities within DHS. The system includes complaints and investigation-related files. DHS OIG manages information provided during the course of its investigations to: Create records showing dispositions of allegations; audit actions taken by DHS management regarding employee misconduct; audit legal actions taken following referrals to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) for criminal prosecution or civil action; calculate and report statistical information; manage OIG investigators’ training; and

manage Government-issued investigative property and other resources used for investigative activities.

DHS is issuing this notice of proposed rulemaking to exempt this system of records from certain provisions of the Privacy Act.

A fuller description of this modified SORN can be found herein the **Federal Register**.

II. Privacy Act

The Privacy Act codifies fair information practice principles in a statutory framework governing the means by which Federal Government agencies collect, maintain, use, and disseminate individuals’ records. The Privacy Act applies to information that is maintained in a “system of records.” A “system of records” is a group of any records under the control of an agency from which information is retrieved by the name of the individual or by some identifying number, symbol, or other identifying particular assigned to the individual. In the Privacy Act, an individual is defined to encompass U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents. Additionally, and similarly, the Judicial Redress Act (JRA) provides a statutory right to covered persons to make requests for access and amendment to covered records, as defined by the JRA, along with judicial review for denials of such requests. In addition, the JRA prohibits disclosures of covered records, except as otherwise permitted by the 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.

DHS is claiming exemptions from certain requirements of the Privacy Act for DHS/OIG–002 Investigative Records System of Records. Some information DHS/OIG–002 Investigative Records System of Records relates to official DHS national security, law enforcement, immigration, intelligence activities, and protective services to the President of the U.S. or other individuals pursuant to Section 3056 and 3056A of Title 18. These exemptions are needed to protect information relating to DHS activities from disclosure to subjects or others related to these activities. Specifically,

the exemptions are required to preclude subjects of these activities from frustrating these processes; to avoid disclosure of activity techniques; to protect the identities and physical safety of confidential informants and law enforcement personnel; to ensure DHS' ability to obtain information from third parties and other sources; to protect the privacy of third parties; to safeguard classified information; and to safeguard records in connection with providing protective services to the President of the U.S. or other individuals pursuant to Section 3056 and 3056A of Title 18. Disclosure of information to the subject of the inquiry could also permit the subject to avoid detection or apprehension.

In appropriate circumstances, when compliance would not appear to interfere with or adversely affect the law enforcement purposes of this system and the overall law enforcement process, the applicable exemptions may be waived on a case by case basis.

A system of records notice for DHS/OIG-002 Investigative Records System of Records is also published in this issue of the **Federal Register**.

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: 6 U.S.C. 101 *et seq.*; Pub. L. 107–296, 116 Stat. 2135; 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. In Appendix C to Part 5, paragraph 5 is revised to read as follows:

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

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5. The DHS/OIG-002 Investigative Records System of Records consists of electronic and paper records and will be used by DHS and its components. The DHS/OIG-002 Investigative Records System of Records is a repository of information held by DHS in connection with its several and varied missions and functions, including, but not limited to the enforcement of civil and criminal laws; investigations, inquiries, and proceedings there under; national security and intelligence activities; and protection of the President of the U.S. or other individuals pursuant to Section 3056 and 3056A of Title 18. The DHS/OIG-002 Investigative Records 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.

The Secretary of Homeland Security, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 552a(j)(2), has exempted this system from the following provisions of the Privacy Act: 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3), (c)(4); (d); (e)(1), (e)(2), (e)(3), (e)(4)(G), (e)(4)(H), (e)(4)(I), (e)(5), (e)(8), (f); and (g)(1). Additionally, the Secretary of Homeland Security, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(1), (k)(2), and (k)(5), has exempted this system from the following provisions of the Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3); (d); (e)(1), (e)(4)(G), (e)(4)(H), (e)(4)(I), and (f).

Exemptions from these particular subsections are justified, on a case-by-case basis to be determined at the time a request is made, for the following reasons:

(a) From subsection (c)(3) and (4) (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 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. When an investigation has been completed, information on disclosures made may continue to be exempted if the fact that an investigation occurred remains sensitive after completion.

(b) From subsection (d) (Access and Amendment 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 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 subsection (e)(2) (Collection of Information from Individuals) because requiring that information be collected from the subject of an investigation would alert the subject to the nature or existence of the investigation, thereby interfering with that investigation and related law enforcement activities.

(e) From subsection (e)(3) (Notice to Subjects) because providing such detailed information could impede law enforcement by compromising the existence of a confidential investigation or reveal the identity of witnesses or confidential informants.

(f) From subsections (e)(4)(G), (H), and (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.

(g) From subsection (e)(5) (Collection of Information) because with the collection of information for law enforcement purposes, it is impossible to determine in advance what information is accurate, relevant, timely, and complete. Compliance with subsection (e)(5) would preclude DHS agents from using their investigative training and exercise of good judgment to both conduct and report on investigations.

(h) From subsection (e)(8) (Notice on Individuals) because compliance would interfere with DHS's ability to obtain, serve, and issue subpoenas, warrants, and other law enforcement mechanisms that may be filed under seal and could result in disclosure of investigative techniques, procedures, and evidence.

(j) From subsection (g)(1) (Civil Remedies) to the extent that the system is exempt from other specific subsections of the Privacy Act.

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Lynn Parker Dupree,

Chief Privacy Officer, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

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