



January 2019

# PRESIDENTIAL SECURITY

## Vetting of Individuals and Secure Areas at Mar-a-Lago

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-246](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

The President has made numerous trips to the Mar-a-Lago property in Palm Beach, Florida, during which he met with foreign leaders and conducted presidential activities.

GAO was asked to review the establishment of secure areas for use by the President at Mar-a-Lago. This report provides information on, among other things, (1) vetting of individuals expected to be near the President; (2) efforts to establish secure areas for handling classified information; and (3) regulations and processes for agency expenditures on employees who travel with the President. This is a public version of a sensitive report that GAO issued in October 2018. Information that the Secret Service and DOD deemed sensitive has been omitted.

GAO analyzed laws, regulations, policies, and procedures; reviewed agreements between federal agencies and trip after-action reports; and interviewed DOD and Secret Service officials. GAO also reviewed vouchers from the four presidential trips to Mar-a-Lago from February 3, 2017 through March 5, 2017. GAO also reviewed documentation and descriptions of specific security practices with DOD and Secret Service officials. The Executive Office of the President has not responded to requests regarding its role in assisting DOD and the Secret Service in carrying out their responsibilities.

View [GAO-19-246](#). For more information, contact Joe Kirschbaum at (202) 512-9971 or at [kirschbaumj@gao.gov](mailto:kirschbaumj@gao.gov) or Diana Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or at [maurerd@gao.gov](mailto:maurerd@gao.gov)

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## What GAO Found

The U.S. Secret Service (Secret Service) vets individuals differently depending on the person's expected proximity to the President when he travels, including during his visits to Mar-a-Lago. According to Secret Service officials, vetting may include using physical screening (measures to detect physical threats to the president and secure the property) and background checks intended to identify individuals who have prior criminal activity or present other types of threats. Individuals at Mar-a-Lago who are not expected to meet with the President or enter spaces the President may visit pass through an outer layer of security consisting of physical screening checkpoints surrounding the property. The Secret Service physically screens all individuals who will access areas where the President will be present, such as a dining room. According to Secret Service officials, individuals who have a meeting with the President generally undergo both physical screening and enhanced background checks.

The Department of Defense (DOD) and the Secret Service coordinate to establish and secure several areas that are suitable for handling classified information when the President travels to Mar-a-Lago. These areas include a conference center, spaces used by staff of the National Security Council and the Executive Office of the President, and presidential transportation vehicles. Details associated with these areas and facilities are sensitive and have been omitted from this report.

The Secret Service and DOD are subject to regulations that govern the reimbursement of employees for official travel expenses. Both organizations have processes to review these travel-related expenses when their personnel travel with the President and try to acquire lodging at the General Services Administration's per diem lodging rate. When the Secret Service is not able to acquire rooms at the per diem lodging rate, including when it needs rooms for operational purposes that exceed 300 percent of the per diem rate (a threshold set by the General Services Administration), employees must submit a waiver request. DOD personnel must also obtain approval when costs exceed the General Services Administration's lodging rate. Our review of DOD vouchers and Secret Service documentation confirmed that personnel did not exceed the 300 percent threshold for lodging during the Mar-a-Lago trips examined in this review. We assessed the costs of Presidential travel in a separate report.

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## Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
FTR	Federal Travel Regulation
JTR	Joint Travel Regulations
Secret Service	U.S. Secret Service
Treasury	U.S. Department of the Treasury

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January 23, 2019

Congressional Requesters

The President has made numerous trips to the Mar-a-Lago property in Palm Beach, Florida. The President has hosted a foreign head of state and head of government and conducted other presidential responsibilities, including addressing matters of national concern, while at Mar-a-Lago, which may render the property a location of potential interest to foreign actors. Because members of the public are able to mingle with the President when he is at Mar-a-Lago, members of Congress and others have raised questions about the protection of classified information at the property. Questions have also been raised with regard to potential conflicts of interest that could arise as a result of foreign government patronage at The Trump Organization's properties.

You asked us to review issues pertaining to the establishment of secure areas where classified information can be handled by the President when he travels to Mar-a-Lago. You also asked us to identify payments made to the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury) that result from foreign government patronage at The Trump Organization properties.<sup>1</sup> This report provides information on (1) processes taken to vet individuals who will be in close proximity to the President when he visits Mar-a-Lago; (2) processes to provide the President with secure areas for handling classified and other sensitive information while at Mar-a-Lago; (3) regulations and processes governing agency expenditures on employee per diem expenses for travel and operational space for personnel who travel with the President; and (4) the Treasury's processes for receiving payments from The Trump Organization or the President and payments that the Treasury has received through these processes. This is a public version of a sensitive GAO report that we issued in October 2018. DOD and the Secret Service deemed some of the information in our October report as sensitive, which must be protected from public disclosure.

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<sup>1</sup>Under federal law, Treasury may receive gifts to reduce the public debt and general gifts to the U.S. Government (Treasury is also authorized to accept gifts for its own use (see 31 U.S.C. § 321(d)), but such gifts are not at issue here). There are several terms used to describe these transactions. Specifically, The Trump Organization policy uses the terms *donation* and *payment*, Treasury uses the term *donation*, and the U.S. Code uses the term *gift*. For consistency and clarity, we will use the term *payment* to refer to a transaction of funds into one of three Treasury accounts and the terms *donation* or *gift* to refer to Treasury processes.

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Therefore, this report omits sensitive information on vetting individuals and providing secure areas for handling classified information. Although the information provided in this report is more limited, the report addresses the same objectives as the sensitive report and uses the same methodology.<sup>2</sup>

To address our first objective, we analyzed guidance and documents related to protective operations from the U.S. Secret Service (Secret Service) and reviewed agreements between federal agencies to identify the measures that agencies are expected to take to vet individuals during the President's domestic trips. We interviewed officials from the Secret Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to ascertain how they partner to vet individuals during the President's trips. We reviewed final survey reports that summarize security measures and actions taken by the Secret Service during the President's four trips to Mar-a-Lago between February 3, 2017 and March 5, 2017 and other documentation. A GAO engagement assessing Presidential travel costs selected the first four trips to Mar-a-Lago after the President's inauguration, because those trips were completed shortly before the date of the Congressional request letter.<sup>3</sup> To stay consistent with concurrent work on Presidential travel costs, the same time frame was selected. We interviewed officials from the Secret Service who were tasked with protecting the President to determine how agreements, policies, and procedures are used to vet individuals when the President is at Mar-a-Lago.

To address our second objective, we reviewed security-related guidance from the Secret Service and the Department of Defense (DOD) to determine the roles that these organizations have in establishing secure areas that may be used to handle classified information when the President travels.<sup>4</sup> We also reviewed Office of the Director of National Intelligence policies and procedures that are to be used when

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<sup>2</sup>*Presidential Security: Vetting of Individuals and Secure Areas at Mar-a-Lago*. GAO-19-177SU (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 2018).

<sup>3</sup>GAO, *Presidential Travel: Secret Service and DOD Need to Ensure That Expenditure Reports Are Prepared and Submitted to Congress*, GAO-19-178 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 17, 2019).

<sup>4</sup>For the purposes of this report, the term "secure areas" refers to locations established and secured by the Secret Service and DOD for use by the President or on the President's behalf to receive, review, and otherwise handle classified or sensitive information. The handling of classified information may include classified conversations or phone calls and viewing classified documents.

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establishing temporary secure areas, such as those used at Mar-a-Lago, for handling classified information. We also reviewed the details of specific security practices for the site with agency officials. We relied on DOD and Secret Service documentation and descriptions of these practices. We discussed with DOD officials after-action reports they prepare to identify vulnerabilities related to information security and steps that have been taken to address these vulnerabilities. We requested from DOD the after-action reports examining areas that may have been used by its personnel, the National Security Council, and the Executive Office of the President during the President's trips. DOD officials provided us with a March 2017 after-action report for the President's March 3-5, 2017 visit to Mar-a-Lago. We reviewed the report to understand the types of information included and assessed by DOD. DOD officials stated that similar reports were developed after each of the President's February 2017 trips to Mar-a-Lago. In addition, we discussed and reviewed with Secret Service officials specific security practices at Mar-a-Lago related to protection of the property, the presidential suite, the dining room, and public areas, among others. We further reviewed the Secret Service's after-action reports for each of the four trips to Mar-a-Lago within our scope. Each report included specific information on what had occurred during the trip and identified what security personnel did in securing each segment of the site. Secret Service personnel made themselves available to answer our questions regarding the report.

To address our third objective, we reviewed laws, regulations, and policies to identify the rules and processes governing agency expenditures on operational spaces and per diem for employees who accompany the President when he is traveling domestically. We reviewed documentation about DOD's and the Secret Service's travel processes, such as policies and agency guidance. In addition, we reviewed the vouchers from the presidential trips to Mar-a-Lago that were completed between February 3, 2017 and March 5, 2017. We also interviewed knowledgeable officials from DOD and the Secret Service. We reviewed relevant policies and spoke with agency officials regarding policies and processes that are in place for when individuals on travel need to exceed the General Services Administration per diem rate. We also reviewed Secret Service documentation regarding waiver requests submitted when individuals traveling with the President exceeded the General Service's Administration per diem rate. In addition to this work, we assessed the

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costs of Presidential travel, which we published in a second report in January 2019.<sup>5</sup>

To address our fourth objective, we reviewed Treasury’s website and interviewed Treasury officials to identify processes for receiving gifts to the federal government and gifts to reduce the public debt. To identify payments received by Treasury from the President or The Trump Organization that were made through the Treasury’s donation processes, we reviewed Treasury accounts and interviewed officials to determine if any payments had been received from January 2017 through August 2018.<sup>6</sup> We also reviewed The Trump Organization’s written policy, which provides its definition of foreign government patronage, explains how it will calculate profits from foreign government patronage, and specifies when The Trump Organization intends to make payments to the Treasury under this policy.<sup>7</sup> Finally, we interviewed attorneys representing The Trump Organization.

Additionally, we contacted the White House Counsel’s Office in May 2017 and January 2018 to solicit the perspective of the Executive Office of the President, including the National Security Council, on efforts to establish secure areas and vet individuals at Mar-a-Lago and manage costs associated with personnel traveling with the President, and on any payments The Trump Organization has made to the U.S. Treasury of profits realized from foreign government patronage of The Trump

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<sup>5</sup>GAO-19-178.

<sup>6</sup>We limited our review to two accounts identified by Treasury officials as those into which such payments would most likely be deposited. We searched all deposits to these accounts using the following keywords or phrases: “President,” “Trump,” “Trump Organization,” “EOP” (Executive Office of the President), and “Mar-a-Lago.” The Treasury deposit data have some limitations. Specifically, the source of a payment is not verified by Treasury, and Treasury’s processes allow donations from anonymous sources. Treasury officials told us they had identified instances since January 2017 where President Trump donated his salary to the National Parks Service and the Department of Education. We did not review these salary donations because they are outside the scope of this report.

<sup>7</sup>This policy defines what The Trump Organization considers to be a foreign government entity and specifies how the company will calculate profits from these entities. According to the policy, a foreign government entity is (1) a department or agency of a foreign government, (2) a foreign embassy, (3) a foreign political party, (4) members of a royal family, or (5) a sovereign wealth fund. Properties subject to the policy include wholly-owned hotels, resorts, and clubs, as well as managed hotels and condominium-hotels. The policy applies to the Mar-a-Lago resort and the Trump Hotel in Washington, D.C., among other properties.

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Organization's properties. As of January 2019, the White House Counsel's Office had not responded to our requests for information.<sup>8</sup>

We conducted this performance audit from April 2017 to October 2018 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We subsequently worked with DOD and the Secret Service, from September 2018 to January 2019 to prepare this unclassified version of the original sensitive report for public release. This public version was also prepared in accordance with these standards.

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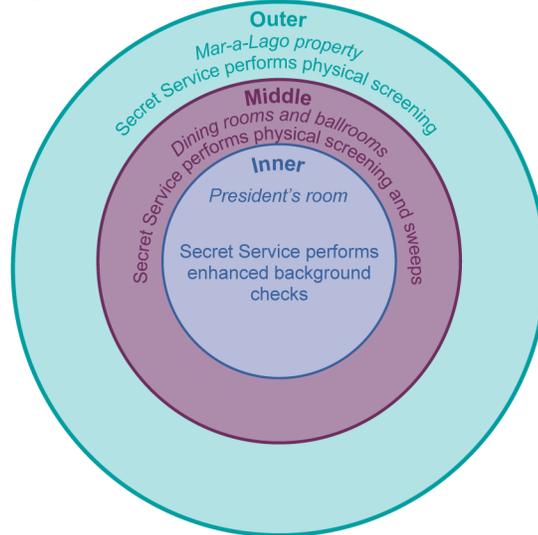
## Secret Service has Processes to Vet Individuals Based on Their Expected Proximity to the President

The Secret Service has processes to vet individuals differently depending on the person's expected proximity to the President, using a combination of physical screening and background checks, as illustrated in figure 1.

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<sup>8</sup>We also contacted the White House Counsel's Office to solicit the perspective of the Executive Office of the President, including the National Security Council, on efforts relevant to our January 2019 review examining presidential travel costs. As of January 2019 we had not received a response to this request.

**Figure 1: Security Layers While Providing Secret Service Protection at Mar-a-Lago**



Source: GAO analysis of Secret Service guidance. | GAO-19-246

According to Secret Service officials, physical screening includes the use of equipment such as wands and magnetometers to secure the property. Background checks assess in part whether an individual has a history of criminal activity.<sup>9</sup> In some cases, enhanced background checks identify other types of threats.

The Secret Service develops and executes a security plan to ensure that the outer, middle, and inner layers at the travel location are secure. Officials from the Secret Service confirmed that agency policies aim to provide comprehensive planning guidance for their agents' activities but are not meant to be all inclusive.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>According to Secret Service officials, the background check process is similar to the process used for individuals who are trying to gain access to the White House. We do not include specific details about the background checks in this report because they are classified.

<sup>10</sup>Officials from the Secret Service indicated that they used protective operations guidance such as, but not limited to, U.S. Secret Service, *Advance-General Information*, OPO-03 (August 24, 2007); U.S. Secret Service, *Protective Advance Guidelines* OPO-04, (August 24, 2007); U.S. Secret Service, *Support*, OPO-11 (August 24, 2007); U.S. Secret Service, *Presidential Protection-Overview*, PPD-02 (June 2, 2015); and U.S. Secret Service, *Name Checks*, PIA-08 (June 30, 2016).

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- **Outer Layer:** The Secret Service uses physical screening measures to establish a layer of security around the Mar-a-Lago property. According to Secret Service officials, state and local law enforcement and the U.S. Coast Guard may monitor entry onto the property or perform visual checks of individuals entering the property and surrounding waterways. Depending on where the President is, guests may be required to pass through a physical security checkpoint that employs magnetometers, wands, and visual checks to assess physical threats.
  - **Middle Layer:** Officials from the Secret Service said that they use physical screening measures for individuals and any rooms that the President may access during his visit. Officials told us that if they are notified of the President's planned arrival to a specific room, they will secure that room.
  - **Inner Layer:** In advance of the President's arrival, the Secret Service has a process requiring vetting of individuals who are expected to be within close proximity to the President for a planned purpose or in certain secure areas. According to Secret Service officials, individuals who need access to secure areas but who are not expected to interact directly with the President, such as wait staff and other workers, are to undergo a background check in addition to physical screening. Individuals who are expected to meet the President are to undergo a background check and an enhanced background check. Officials from the Secret Service said that they are responsible for collecting the findings from these checks and making recommendations to the Executive Office of the President on whether individuals with derogatory findings should be allowed to access a space. According to officials from the Secret Service, staff at Mar-a-Lago routinely undergo background checks.

In order to conduct the background check, the Secret Service is to use personally identifiable information for each individual, and those individuals' names may be checked against indexes maintained by the Secret Service and other federal, state, and local law enforcement organizations. The Secret Service's guidance notes that submission of the requested information to run a background check is based on individuals voluntarily providing the needed information.<sup>11</sup> In order to conduct an enhanced background check, the Secret Service collaborates with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other federal agency partners. According to officials from the Secret Service, the Executive

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<sup>11</sup>U.S. Secret Service, *Name Checks*, PIA-08 (June 30, 2016).

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Office of the President is responsible for identifying individuals who are expected to meet with the President and providing the Secret Service with the names and the personally identifiable information needed to complete these checks.

According to Secret Service guidance, White House staff is expected to submit all names to the Secret Service at least 72 hours in advance of the President's arrival. Advance agents are also responsible for setting deadlines for completing background checks. Officials from the Secret Service said that, based on the information received from these checks, the Secret Service will make a recommendation to the Executive Office of the President on whether an individual should be granted access to the President. According to these officials, the Executive Office of the President ultimately determines whether or not an individual will have access. However, the Secret Service is responsible for ensuring that the area is safe and that the individual is physically screened.

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## DOD and the Secret Service Provide Secure Areas for the Handling of Classified Information When the President Travels to Mar-a-Lago

DOD's White House Communications Agency and the Secret Service each have specific responsibilities for establishing secure communications and secure areas for handling classified information when the President travels to domestic locations, such as Mar-a-Lago.

- **DOD's White House Communications Agency:** This organization is an information technology unit within DOD that supports the President and his staff during presidential trips. This organization's mission is to provide information services to the President, Vice President, National Security Staff, Secret Service, and others when directed.<sup>12</sup> According to agency guidance and officials, the White House Communications Agency is responsible for installing secure communications equipment that enables the exchange of classified information in areas that may be used by these entities.
- **Secret Service:** According to officials from the Secret Service, they send an advance team that coordinates with the White House Communications Agency to set up a conference center for the President where classified information may be exchanged, among

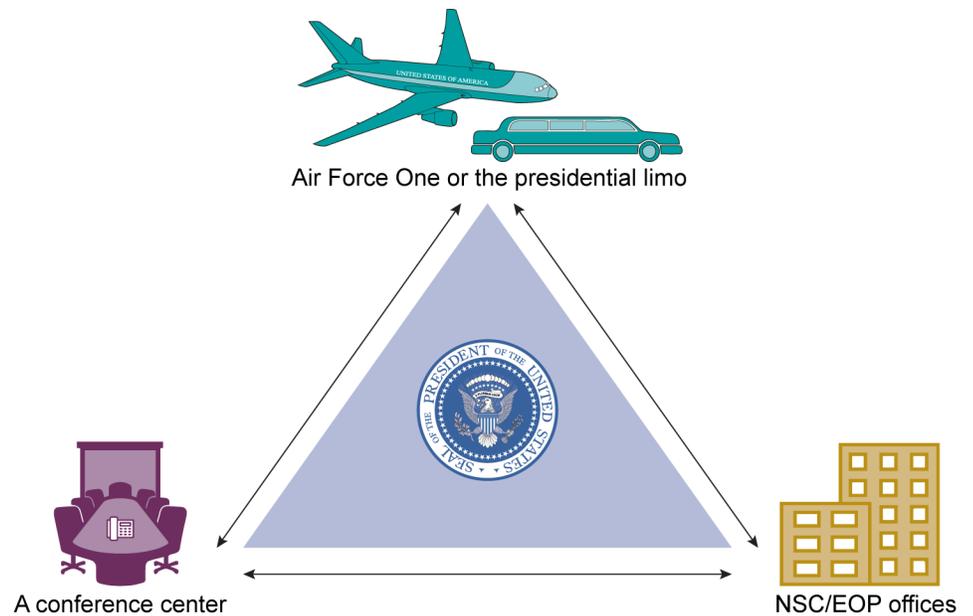
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<sup>12</sup>Defense Information Systems Agency, DISA Circular 640-45-48, *White House Communications Agency* (Mar. 13, 2014).

other things. These officials stated that they provide security at the entrance of this conference center and perform security sweeps to ensure that it is safe and secure.

DOD and the Secret Service coordinate to establish and secure several areas that are available for handling classified information when the President travels to locations such as Mar-a-Lago, as shown in figure 2. These areas include a conference center, spaces used by staff of the National Security Council and Executive Office of the President, and presidential transportation vehicles. Details associated with these areas and facilities are sensitive and have been omitted from this report.

**Figure 2: Areas Available to Handle Classified Information during Domestic Presidential Travel**



NSC/EOP: National Security Council/Executive Office of the President

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense and Secret Service information. | GAO-19-246

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## Regulations and Processes Governing Secret Service and DOD Expenditures on Employee Per Diem Expenses for Travel and Operational Space in Support of the President

The Secret Service and DOD are subject to regulations governing reimbursements to employees for official travel. Processes exist to review these travel-related expenses when personnel from these agencies travel. These processes are the same when personnel accompany the President to Mar-a-Lago.<sup>13</sup>

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## Federal Regulations Govern Agencies' Policies for Paying Or Reimbursing Employees' Official Duty Travel Expenses

Two regulations implement statutory requirements and executive branch policies for travel, allowing agencies to pay for or reimburse their employees' per diem expenses (lodging, meals and incidental expenses) and other travel-related expenses:

- **The Federal Travel Regulation (FTR)**, issued by the General Services Administration applies to the Secret Service's personnel.<sup>14</sup>
- **The Joint Travel Regulations (JTR)**, issued by the Department of Defense apply to DOD personnel.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>In addition to this work, we assessed the costs of Presidential travel in a second report. See GAO, *Presidential Travel: Secret Service and DOD Need to Ensure That Expenditure Reports Are Prepared and Submitted to Congress*, GAO-19-178 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 17, 2019).

<sup>14</sup>The Federal Travel Regulation, issued by the General Services Administration, applies to most federal employees. See 5 U.S.C § 5707 (authorizing the General Services Administration to issue travel regulations). The Federal Travel Regulation is found at 41 C.F.R. chs. 300-304. Following the time frame for the trips that we reviewed, on May 5, 2017, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 provided authority to the Secret Service to pay per diem travel expenses (i.e., lodging, and meals and incidental expenses) of employees on protective missions without regard to the General Services Administration's reimbursement rates for federal employee travel. Pub. L. No. 115-31, div. F, tit. II, 131 Stat. 135, 410. This language also appears in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018, Pub. L. No. 115-141, div. F. tit. II.

<sup>15</sup>The Joint Travel Regulations, issued by DOD, are applicable to uniformed service members and DOD civilian employees (referred to as DOD personnel in this report). For DOD civilian employees, the Joint Travel Regulations incorporate elements of the Federal Travel Regulation and regulate per diem and travel allowances, among other things.

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Both regulations allow agencies to pay for employees' daily expenses when they are traveling within the continental United States, based on allowances set by the General Services Administration for the applicable location and date (per diem rates) or the actual expense of travel.<sup>16</sup> Under the Federal Travel Regulation, the maximum amount that a civilian employee may be reimbursed is 300 percent of the applicable per diem rate.<sup>17</sup> The Joint Travel Regulations allow uniformed service members to be reimbursed up to 300 percent of the per diem rate when they are traveling in the continental United States, but they can be reimbursed more than 300 percent of the per diem rate for lodging when traveling outside the continental United States.<sup>18</sup>

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### The Secret Service Has a Standard Process for Overseeing Costs for Lodging, Meals and Incidental Expenses, and Operational Space during Presidential Travel

Officials from the Secret Service stated that they apply the same cost oversight processes for all presidential travel. Expenses for lodging and operational space are centrally billed to the agency, and employee meals and incidental expenses are reimbursed to the traveler. In accordance with policy, the Secret Service tries to acquire lodging at the General Services Administration's per diem lodging rate and must submit a waiver request for any room that exceeds this designated rate by any amount.<sup>19</sup> The Secret Service field office closest to the travel destination is responsible for arranging for these spaces, negotiating rates, and if necessary submitting a waiver request to officials in the Secret Service's Logistics Resource Center. The Logistics Resource Center is to review the waiver request, determine whether a more cost effective method exists to meet the need, and approve or reject the request.

In some cases, the Secret Service may not be able to acquire rooms at the per diem lodging rate, or agents may need rooms for operational purposes that exceed 300 percent of the per diem rate, which is more

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<sup>16</sup>FTR pt. 301-11; JTR 020301, 020307, 0318. Payment under the actual expense method is permitted for a variety of reasons, such as costs escalating due to special events (e.g., sporting events or disasters) or because of mission requirements. FTR § 301-11.300; JTR 020307. DOD establishes per diem rates for overseas non-foreign areas and the Department of State does so for foreign overseas locations. The General Services Administration's per diem rate for the West Palm Beach area, which includes Mar-a-Lago, from January 2017 to March 2017, was \$182 for lodging and \$59 for meals and incidental expenses.

<sup>17</sup>FTR §§ 301-11.30(a), 301-11.303, 301-11.305; JTR 020307.

<sup>18</sup>JTR 020307.D.

<sup>19</sup>U.S. Secret Service, *Hotel Accommodations*, FMD-08 (07), (Jan. 3. 2008)

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than is allowed for lodging under the Federal Travel Regulation. For example, the Secret Service may use a room for operational purposes or reserve rooms adjacent to the President to better protect him. In addition, to meet operational demands, the Secret Service may require a certain number of agents to stay at the hotel in which the President is staying, so that they are within a certain proximity of the President at all times. Furthermore, officials from the Secret Service said that members of the Secret Service canine teams must stay at hotels that allow animals, and rooms at these hotels may exceed the General Services Administration lodging rate.

The authorities the Secret Service has relied on to pay for hotel rooms needed to meet its operational requirements do not limit how much the agency can pay.<sup>20</sup> Further, Congress passed a law in May of 2017 excepting the Secret Service from regulatory caps on room rentals, regardless of room purpose.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, consistent with the Secret Service waiver process, personnel are still required to submit waiver requests for operational spaces to justify the need to book rooms during the President's trips to Mar-a-Lago at prices higher than the General Service Administration lodging rates. We confirmed that a blanket waiver request was submitted and approved for all rooms at Mar-a-Lago that exceeded the General Services Administration per diem lodging rate during the President's trips to Mar-a-Lago that are covered by this review.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, we reviewed Secret Service documentation and

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<sup>20</sup>The Federal Travel Regulation provides that payment for miscellaneous expenses—including the hire of a conference center or a hotel room for official business—may be made when authorized by the agency and under the agency's governing policy. FTR §§ 301-12.1, 301-70.301. In addition, according to the Secret Service Office of the Chief Counsel, the Secret Service has relied on a 1982 GAO decision that provides that an agency may rent accommodations that cost more than applicable limitations where (a) use of the particular accommodations is an integral part of the employee's job assignment and (b) failure to provide such accommodations would frustrate the ability of the agency to carry out its statutory mandate. B-209375, Dec. 7, 1982. By statute, GAO's authority to adjudicate these kinds of claims as they relate to lodging rooms was transferred to the General Services Administration, among other agencies, in 1996.

<sup>21</sup>Following the time frame for the trips that we reviewed, on May 5, 2017, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 provided authority to the Secret Service to pay per diem travel expenses (i.e., lodging and meals and incidental expenses) of employees on protective missions without regard to the General Services Administration's reimbursement rates for federal employee travel. Pub. L. No. 115-31, 131 Stat. at 410. Therefore, since May 2017, the Secret Service has not been subject to regulatory caps on room rental, regardless of room purpose.

<sup>22</sup>We do not include information on the specific number of rooms in this report that exceed the per diem rate, because it is classified.

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confirmed that Secret Service personnel did not exceed the 300 percent threshold for lodging.

For meals and incidental expenses, the Secret Service's employees who are on official duty are to submit a claim for reimbursement electronically or by paper and receipts, as applicable, at the conclusion of the trip.<sup>23</sup> Approving officials are to approve (or deny) expenses, and the Secret Service's Financial Management Division authorizes reimbursement for approved travel.

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### DOD Has a Standard Process to Oversee Costs for Lodging, Meals and Incidental Expenses, and Operational Space during Presidential Travel To Mar-A-Lago

DOD personnel use the same processes for travel to Mar-a-Lago as they do for other Presidential trips to oversee costs for lodging, meals, and incidental expenses. According to officials from DOD's Defense Travel Management Office, their office establishes travel policy that applies to the four organizations that travel in support of the President's trips.<sup>24</sup> DOD personnel use the Defense Travel System to submit travel documents, including vouchers and receipts, as applicable.<sup>25</sup> According to officials, lodging may be booked and reimbursed on an individual basis or centrally billed if a block of rooms is needed over the same period. Meals and incidental expenses are reimbursed to the traveler. Like Secret Service's personnel, DOD personnel must obtain approval from an authorizing official prior to the trip to exceed the General Services Administration per diem lodging rate, consistent with the Federal Travel Regulation and Joint Travel Regulations.<sup>26</sup> According to officials from the Defense Travel Management Office, DOD typically would not reimburse expenses above the approved lodging rate if lodging at the approved rate was available within the region. However, officials from the Defense Finance and

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<sup>23</sup>Secret Service employees are to submit receipts for baggage charges and claims of \$40 or more. Categories of expenses that can require receipts include but are not limited to transportation, mileage, and parking.

<sup>24</sup>Personnel from the 89<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, Military Working Dog Program, explosive ordnance personnel, and the White House Military Office (which includes the White House Communications Agency) accompany the President when he travels or travel in advance of the President.

<sup>25</sup>The Defense Travel System is DOD's electronic system for receiving, processing, and approving travel for DOD personnel.

<sup>26</sup>Under the Joint Travel Regulations, the Authorizing or Approving Official determines whether travel is necessary and appropriate to the mission, ensures that all expenses claimed by the traveler are valid, and authorizes or approves the expenses if they are valid. JTR 010201.B.

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Accounting Service indicated that presidential trips may require such a deviation.<sup>27</sup> These approvals are to be tracked in the Defense Travel System.

The White House Military Office, which includes the White House Communications Agency, also sends personnel with the President when he travels. White House Communications Agency officials told us that its lodging and operational space for these personnel are typically coordinated by the White House Travel Office and that DOD personnel pay for the associated costs and seek reimbursement from DOD after the trip is complete.<sup>28</sup>

According to officials from the White House Communications Agency, some personnel are required to remain at, or near, the Mar-a-Lago property. If they are not required to stay at or near the property, they will try to obtain lodging at hotels in the area at the General Services Administration's per diem rate for lodging. DOD officials told us that according to the Joint Travel Regulations, DOD is not authorized to pay or reimburse daily expenses above the 300 percent ceiling. In connection with the President's travel to Mar-a-Lago between February 3, 2017 and March 5, 2017, DOD personnel exceeded the General Services Administration per diem rate but did not exceed the 300 percent threshold.

According to officials from the Defense Travel Management Office, operational space used for official business is governed by the Federal Acquisition Regulation.<sup>29</sup> White House Communications Agency officials told us that they have generally used space near the Mar-a-Lago property but leased property, effective September 2017, near Mar-a-Lago to reduce the cost of supporting the President's trips to the property.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>The Joint Travel Regulations provide that DOD personnel traveling with certain dignitaries, including the President, are eligible for actual expense authorization at or below 300 percent of per diem without further demonstration of unusual or extraordinary requirements. JTR 0318.

<sup>28</sup>Operational space includes conference centers or hotel rooms used for official business.

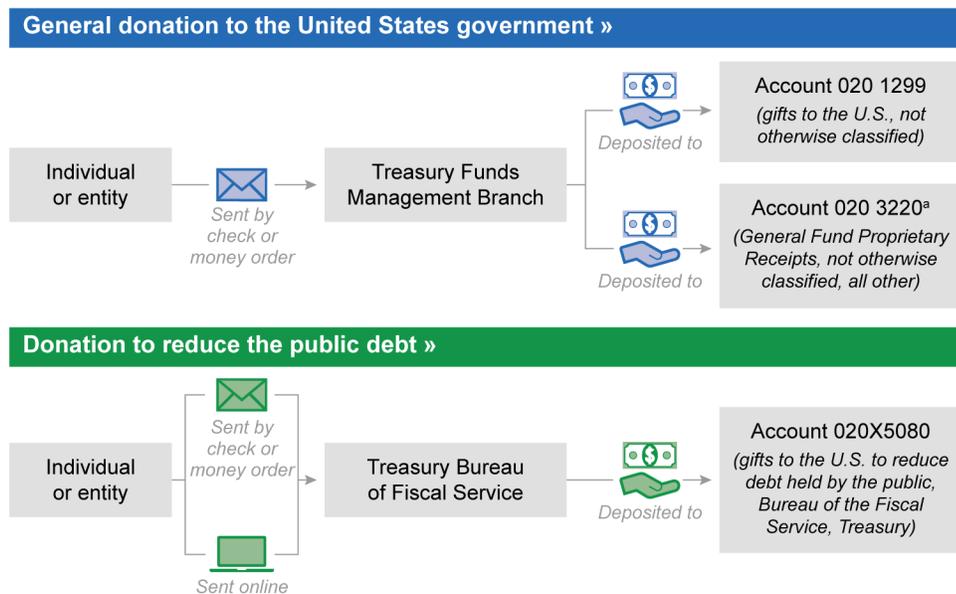
<sup>29</sup>These officials said that the JTR—which includes caps on lodging costs—did not apply. GSA officials also told us that non-lodging rooms are not regulated by the FTR.

<sup>30</sup>The White House Communications Agency's lease is for 1 year with 6 additional 1-year options and a 5-month option.

## Payments Received by the U.S. Treasury Department from The Trump Organization through Treasury’s Donation Processes

Treasury has regular processes for receiving payments designated as gifts to the United States and gifts to reduce the public debt. Treasury officials stated that any payments received from The Trump Organization or the President that are designated as gifts would be handled using these processes. Under federal law, Treasury may receive general gifts to the U.S. Government and may also receive gifts to reduce the public debt.<sup>31</sup> Treasury has developed processes to accept these types of payments, as shown in figure 3.

**Figure 3: U.S. Treasury Department Donation Processes**



Source: GAO analysis of Treasury donation processes. | GAO-19-246

Note: According to Treasury officials, a donation made to reduce the public debt must typically be marked as such or it will be processed as a general donation to the U.S. government.

<sup>3</sup>Officials told us that in rare cases in which payments are not clearly identified as gifts to the United States government, they might be deposited into this account. However, they said that this type of deposit would be unusual.

Treasury officials said there are three accounts available to receive payments as gifts—a general gift account, a general fund receipts account, and an account for gifts to reduce the public debt. Any of these

<sup>31</sup>See 31 U.S.C. §§ 3113, 3302. Treasury is also authorized to accept gifts for its own use (see 31 U.S.C. § 321(d)), but such gifts are not at issue here.

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accounts could receive payments designated as gifts by the President or The Trump Organization.<sup>32</sup> Treasury officials told us they would deposit such payments into the account for gifts to the U.S. Government unless the payment source specified that the funds should be used to reduce the public debt.

Treasury received one payment from The Trump Organization, for \$151,470 that was submitted through Treasury's processes on February 22, 2018. In May 2017, The Trump Organization issued a policy addressing profits generated from foreign government patronage at its businesses.<sup>33</sup> The Trump Organization's policy states that it will make a single lump-sum payment annually after the end of its fiscal year, which ends on December 31st. We did not identify any other payments that Treasury received from The Trump Organization or the President between January 21, 2017, and August 1, 2018.<sup>34</sup> In September 2018, an attorney for The Trump Organization confirmed that the organization had not made any payments since February 22, 2018.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided copies of this draft report to DOD, DHS, the Department of Justice, the General Services Administration, the Department of Treasury, and the Executive Office of the President for comment. We also provided a section to the Trump Organization for comment. DHS provided written comments, which are reprinted in their entirety in appendix I. DHS, DOD, the Department of Treasury and the Department of Justice also provided technical comments, which we incorporated into this report as appropriate. The Executive Office of the President and the Trump Organization provided no comments.

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<sup>32</sup>Officials told us that in rare cases in which payments are not clearly identified as gifts to the United States government, they might be deposited into the General Fund Proprietary Receipts, not otherwise classified account. However, they said that this type of deposit would be unusual.

<sup>33</sup>The policy provides that it is applicable to profits generated from foreign governments' patronage from wholly-owned properties and profits generated from management fees earned from managed hotels and condominium hotels that are attributed to foreign governments' patronage.

<sup>34</sup>Treasury officials told us they had identified instances in which President Trump had donated his salary to the National Park Service and the Department of Education since he took office on January 21, 2017. We did not review these salary donations, because they are outside the scope of this review.

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As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly release this report earlier, we will not issue the report until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will also provide copies to the Secretary of Defense, the Director of the Secret Service, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Attorney General, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Administrator of the General Services Administration, and the Secretary of the Treasury. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov).

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact Joseph (Joe) Kirschbaum at (202) 512-9971 or at [KirschbaumJ@gao.gov](mailto:KirschbaumJ@gao.gov) or Diana Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or at [MaurerD@gao.gov](mailto:MaurerD@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in Appendix II.



Joseph W. Kirschbaum, Director  
Defense Capabilities and Management



Diana Maurer, Director  
Homeland Security and Justice Issues

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*List of Requesters*

The Honorable Gary Peters  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate

The Honorable Elijah Cummings  
Chairman  
Committee on Oversight and Reform  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Tom Udall  
United States Senate

The Honorable Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senate

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senate

The Honorable Ted W. Lieu  
House of Representatives

# Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security



September 14, 2018

Joseph Kirschbaum  
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Diana Maurer  
Director, Homeland Security and Justice  
U.S. Government Accountability Office 441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Re: Management Response to Draft Report GAO-18-463SU, "Presidential Security: Vetting of Individuals and Secure Areas at Mar-a-Lago"

Dear Mr. Kirschbaum and Ms. Maurer:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

The Department is pleased to note GAO's positive recognition of the Secret Service's security measures used to safeguard the President in advance of and during his travel. Protecting the President and securing Mar-a-Lago is a meticulous and coordinated effort between the Secret Service and Federal, State, and local partners, including the Executive Office of the President. Each trip to Mar-a-Lago presents a unique challenge due to revolving guests. As such, Secret Service Agents, Uniformed Division Officers, and Administrative, Professional, and Technical personnel employ various security measures to ensure individuals are vetted appropriately depending on their proximity to the President, and that areas the President accesses are safe and secure. Additionally, the Secret Service works closely with the Department of Defense to reinforce the security of classified areas. The Secret Service remains committed to its primary mission of ensuring the safety and security of the Nation's highest elected leaders, visiting foreign dignitaries, designated facilities and major events.

We also noted GAO's positive findings that (1) Secret Service reimbursement processes for official travel expenses during the four Mar-a-Lago trips reviewed were consistent and aligned with the General Services Administration's (GSA) Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), and

(2) the Secret Service did not exceed the FTR's threshold for lodging. The Secret Service makes a concerted effort to obtain lodging at or below established per diem rates. In rare instances when the agency must exceed the GSA rate due to operational demands, Secret Service's Logistics Resource Center will review, approve or deny justifications received for each lodging waiver, as appropriate. The men and women of the Secret Service will continue to ensure they have strong internal controls for travel reimbursements, driving efficiency and effectiveness of mission delivery for the American taxpayer.

The report did not contain any recommendations requiring a response. However, we provided technical comments under a separate cover for your consideration.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future.

Sincerely,



J. H. CRUMPACKER, CIA, CFE  
Director  
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

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# Appendix II: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contacts

Joe Kirschbaum at (202) 512-9971 or at [kirschbaumj@gao.gov](mailto:kirschbaumj@gao.gov) or Diana Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or at [maurerd@gao.gov](mailto:maurerd@gao.gov)

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## Staff Acknowledgments:

In addition to the contacts named above, Gina R. Hoffman, Assistant Director; Joseph P. Cruz, Assistant Director; Tracy Barnes, Nicholas Benne, Jennifer Kamara, Joanne Landesman, Amie Lesser, Thomas Lombardi, Carol Petersen, Michael Silver, Janet Temko-Blinder, Christopher Turner, Kayli Westling, and Alex Winograd made key contributions to this report.

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