

# WebMemo



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## Looming Budget Cuts at the DHS Office of Policy

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As Congress moves through the fiscal year (FY) 2012 appropriations process, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Policy may receive a dramatic decrease in funding. While it is important that Congress seek out cost savings within DHS, the Office of Policy is a critical player in policy development and interagency activities. It is also home to key programs—such as the Visa Waiver Program (VWP)—that are essential for DHS's success.

Congress should ensure that the office's operations are adequately funded while cutting funding in areas that need less money, such as bureaucratic and inefficient homeland security grants.

**DHS Office of Policy.** The Office of Policy was created in 2005 to improve policy development, coordination, and oversight department-wide. Examples of activities performed by the office include:

- Leading interagency policy development on homeland security matters.
- Coordinating policy development among components in order to formulate one voice for DHS in interagency policy negotiations.
- Overseeing DHS's international engagement efforts. Recent activities include assistance with the formulation of the new National Security Decision Directive-38, which governs the DHS footprint overseas, the addition of attaches at key locations, and a new strategy for international engagement. For example, the Office of Policy

helped to create a new memorandum of understanding to manage technical assistance efforts abroad in coordination with the U.S. Department of State.

- Influencing the DHS budget process through efforts such as program guidance, the acquisition process, and a new strategy development process.

The Office of Policy is also home to several key programs including the VWP, which extends visa-free status to travelers from member countries. This partnership requires that member countries institute certain security protocols and commit to information-sharing agreements. As a result of these partnerships, the VWP is a valuable part of the nation's counterterrorism structure.

Also housed in the Office of Policy are important activities related to screening foreign acquisitions of U.S. companies and assets for national security concerns and housing a representative to the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States.

Over the past few years, the Office of Policy has also dramatically increased its capacity to act as a critical resource for DHS. This has included changes in both its hiring and budget processes.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
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**FY 2012 Appropriations.** The DHS Office of Policy has been a repeated victim of legislative cuts—a trend that threatens to continue into the FY 2012 appropriations cycle. This is a mistake. Certainly there may be room for Congress to spend smarter on homeland security, but hamstringing the valuable efforts of the Office of Policy will impede—if not completely halt—current efforts and important programs. Instead, Congress should:

- **Fully fund the Office of Policy.** Congress should ensure that the office is fully funded. This will demonstrate a legislative commitment to the office's important functions and recognize the vital role that its efforts play in the overall DHS mission.
- **Create a policy undersecretary.** Despite efforts by multiple Secretaries of Homeland Security to establish an undersecretary for policy within DHS, the department has been left unchanged. Elevating this position would demonstrate that Congress is committed to the long-range strategic planning that is necessary for DHS to adequately meet its missions.
- **Fix oversight of homeland security.** Part of the reason that Congress lacks an appreciation of the activities of the Office of Policy is the number of committees with oversight over DHS. With 108 committees, subcommittees, and commissions with oversight over DHS, politics rather than smart security often rules the process. Consolidating oversight would help ease this problem. Congressional leadership should make such consolidation a priority.

**Cut Elsewhere.** The Office of Policy is an example of the right direction for DHS. The office is forward-thinking and tasked with important projects and programs that have and will continue to have a meaningful impact on the future of the DHS. Congress should not let politics stand in the way of securing the homeland.

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