

Judges' Security Gets Harsh Look; U.S. Marshals Fall Short in Many Cases, 2004 Report Asserts

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A 2004 Justice Department inspector general's report lambasted the U.S. Marshals Service for how it protects the federal judiciary.

The review, prompted by congressional concerns, found that marshals routinely fail to assess threats against judges in a timely manner, don't share information with appropriate agencies and lack the standards to determine appropriate protection.

The report evaluated the service's efforts to better protect the more than 2,000 federal judges and magistrates following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Since the murder Monday of U.S. District Judge Joan H. Lefkow's husband and mother, public officials have called for a renewed look at judicial security. Rep. Jan **Schakowsky** (D-Ill) called for increased funding to the Marshals Service, which now has 75 percent of the staff needed to complete its mission, she wrote last week in a letter to President Bush.

Kim Widup, the U.S. marshal for the Northern District of Illinois, said the report was written by "accountants," had a national scope and was not specific to this region. He said his office has three agents assigned full time to assessing the constant stream of threats to judges in its jurisdiction.

Widup said some of the recommendations could be adopted, while others will be rejected.

The report outlined glaring problems within the service, even though Congress has increased funding for judicial security by 50 percent and has authorized the hiring of 106 new court security inspectors since 2001.

"Our report appropriately warns of significant vulnerabilities in critical elements of the [Marshals Service's] program," the report stated.

More than 73 percent of the threats from 2000 to 2003 took more than the recommended time to assess, the report said. And the system for rating the seriousness of threats is based solely on the "expert opinion" of a senior court security inspector without written criteria for assigning the ratings, the report said.

But even of the 68 threats declared to be "high" in risk during seven months in 2003, only 37 percent were processed within the standard time.

"The [Marshals Service's] shortcomings in quickly and effectively assessing threats, including those associated with terrorist and other high-threat trials, increase the risk that members of the federal judiciary may not be adequately protected," the report said.

The report also found at the time of the review that the service didn't have a central program to collect, assess and share intelligence on threats to the judiciary, and that procedural manuals had not been updated in more than a decade.

In a response to a draft of the report, the Marshals Service called the report incomplete and misrepresentative.