

Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Is Demanding Answers From DHS and DOJ

Several members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, led by Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), have called upon the departments of justice and homeland security to explain what they are doing to stop granting U.S. citizenship to those who are ineligible.

The letter follows a recent report by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General that stated at least 858 people—many from countries with ties to terrorism—were granted U.S. citizenship despite having final orders of removal under another name. These errors occurred because DHS failed to properly update and share digital fingerprint records used in vetting foreign nationals.

“For decades, fingerprinting has proven to be a simple and effective tool to conduct routine background checks and to break open criminal investigations,” Grassley said. “Just this week, we saw how fingerprints provided clues that helped identify and lead to the capture of a suspected terrorist who brought violence to New York and New Jersey.

“So it is astounding to learn that the Department of Homeland Security has failed to properly update and share the fingerprint records of individuals who should have been deported. What’s worse, some of them are getting full citizenship because immigration authorities can’t manage the simplest pieces of identifying evidence.”

The report paints a much darker picture, though. It indicated fingerprint records for at least 148,000 immigrants—again, many from countries with ties to terrorism—who have been ordered removed have not yet been uploaded to the digital

fingerprint databases. As a result, some individuals who may have criminal records or have previously been deported, may continue to be granted citizenship under aliases.

In a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson and Attorney General Loretta Lynch, the senators are seeking details on the individuals listed in the OIG report. They are also seeking information about whether or not the departments are using their full authorities to update the fingerprint databases, improve information sharing with FBI databases, and correct the statuses of all individuals who were granted citizenship in error.

In addition to Grassley, the letter was signed by Sens. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), John Cornyn (R-Texas), Mike Lee (R-Utah), Ted Cruz (R-Texas), Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), David Vitter (R-La.), David Perdue (R-Ga.) and Thom Tillis (R-N.C.).