

# 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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## PRESIDENTIAL SECURITY

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

## 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.