

**Frequently Asked Questions for
CCI 231.04 “National Security and Suitability Background Investigations”**

Q. What has changed in this policy?

Previous Policy	New Policy
Includes Inactive Reserve	Removes mention of Inactive Reserve and extends applicability to the Ready Reserve Corps, specifically naming the Individual Ready Reserve and Selected Ready Reserve
Title is “Background Investigation Requirement”	Changes title to “National Security and Suitability Background Investigations”
Has older security procedures	Incorporates new processes and procedures regarding security investigations
Is missing newer authorities	includes more recent authorities
Contains older language and outdated information	Updates terminology and levels of required investigations for PHS officers
Has no language on continuous vetting and says reinvestigations take place every 10 years	Requires officers to comply with reinvestigations and continuous vetting requirements
Has no mention of the Internet or social media	Adds requirements for the collection and use of publicly available social media information.
Only includes inter-service transfers, not transfers from the Reserves	Clarifies the investigation requirements for transfers from the Ready Reserve Corps to the Regular Corps and inter-service transfers

Q. What security and suitability background investigations do the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Corps require?

- A.** Members of both Regular Corps (on active duty) and the Ready Reserve Corps must obtain and maintain a favorably adjudicated Tier 3 national security background investigation (except for officers in Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (COSTEP) who only need a Tier 1 non-sensitive suitability investigation) with an additional State criminal history child-care check for appointment and/or continued service on active duty.

Q. Who must undergo this investigation?

- A.** The USPHS Commissioned Corps will investigate all members of the Regular Corps and the Ready Reserve Corps including, but not limited to, members serving on active duty, Public Health Service (PHS) officers serving in any component of the Ready Reserve Corps (e.g., Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), Selected Ready Reserve (SELRES)), and officers participating in the JRCOSTEP or SRCOSTEP. SRCOSTEP officers only need a Tier 1 non-sensitive suitability investigation until they apply to transfer to the Regular Corps. At that time, they must obtain and maintain a favorably adjudicated Tier 3 national security investigation.

Q. How often will the USPHS Commissioned Corps investigate me?

- A. The USPHS Commissioned Corps will investigate all applicants for the Regular Corps and the Ready Reserve Corps, including graduating members of SRCOSTEP. Under Continuous Vetting, the Corps will not maintain a regular schedule of investigations but will investigate PHS officers as needed. All members of the Corps must comply promptly with the requirements for a periodic re-investigation that is initiated by the Corps or the Operating Division (OPDIV), Staff Division (STAFFDIV), or the non-Health and Human Services (HHS) organization to which the officer is assigned. When the Corps and/or the officer's OPDIV/STAFFDIV/non-HHS organization implements continuous vetting, the officer must comply with all requirements to ensure that the officer maintains a favorably adjudicated national security or suitability investigation and state criminal history child care check.

Q. What must I do to cooperate with this investigation?

- A. All candidates will initiate and complete the required investigative paperwork prior to being called to active duty plus submit a written acknowledgement that the SG will immediately terminate the candidate's commission if the national security or suitability investigation with an additional State criminal history child-care check is deemed unsatisfactory or is not favorably adjudicated.

All candidates must fully complete and submit all required investigative documents, a favorable fingerprint check, and a favorable national security or suitability investigation with an additional State criminal history child-care check with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) prior to being appointed into the USPHS Commissioned Corps. All individuals who are appointed to the Corps must obtain a favorably adjudicated national security or suitability investigation with an additional State criminal history child-care check. All Regular Corps and Ready Reserve Corps officers must have a favorably adjudicated national security or suitability investigation on file with CCHQ.

Q. How will the investigation be conducted?

- A. CCHQ will initiate and fund the initial national security or suitability investigation with an additional State criminal history child-care check for all applicants to the Regular Corps, and will initiate and fund the initial and subsequent/continuous vetting national security or suitability investigation for applicants to and members of the Ready Reserve Corps. The duty station to which a member of the Regular Corps is assigned will initiate and fund any subsequent/continuous vetting national security or suitability investigations with an additional State criminal history child-care check while the member remains on active duty.

Q. Will the investigation examine my use of social media?

- A. Agencies where candidates/members of the Regular Corps and the Ready Reserve Corps may be/are assigned may collect publicly available social media information while conducting a national security or suitability investigation. The scope of this collection will be limited to that which is needed to determine initial or continuing security suitability. They will not examine a PHS officer's non-publicly available social media information. Agencies may collect publicly available social media information only after a candidate/member of the Regular Corps or the Ready Reserve Corps signs an Authorization of Release of

Information, which includes notice of the collection of publicly available social media information.

Q. What happens if the investigation finds something?

- A. For PHS officers in their probationary period the SG will terminate the commission of officers who fail to obtain, or do not maintain, a favorably adjudicated national security/suitability investigation within their probationary period. However, if this failure is based on any of the conditions outlined in 18 U.S.C. Chapter 115, the SG will refer the officer's records to the HHS Secretary.

If the officer has less than 20 Years and More than 3 Years Retirement Credit, the Director, CCHQ, may refer to an Involuntary Termination Board (ITB) (see CCD 123.01, "Involuntary Separation") any officer who does not obtain and/or maintain a favorably adjudicated national security or suitability investigation with an additional State criminal history child-care check.

However, if the failure is based on any of the conditions outlined in 18 U.S.C. Chapter 115 the USPHS Commissioned Corps will refer the officer's records to the HHS Secretary upon a criminal conviction by a civil or military court or after a review by a Board of Inquiry. The Secretary will decide whether the officer's commission will be terminated. For cases involving matters other than disloyalty or subversion, the SG will render the decision regarding reassignment or termination when deemed necessary or advisable in the interest of national security.

If the officer has 20 Years or More Retirement Credit, the Director, CCHQ, may refer to an involuntary retirement board officers who are unable to obtain and/or maintain a favorably adjudicated national security/suitability investigation. The Corps also may refer the records of such an officer to a Board of Inquiry (BOI) if warranted.

Note: Under extraordinary circumstances, the SG, ASH, and/or Secretary may continue to keep an officer on active duty if the officer fails to obtain and/or maintain a favorably adjudicated Tier 3 national security or suitability investigation with an additional State criminal history child-care check. The SG will reevaluate such officers who have less than 20 years creditable service for retirement at 20 years of service to determine if continued retention on active duty is warranted.

Q. Can I appeal a negative finding?

- A. The USPHS Commissioned Corps has no ability to overturn a security decision.

Q. Who has the final say on security matters?

- A. The Secretary has retained the authority to suspend or separate any person on grounds of disloyalty or subversion, restore to duty any person who has been suspended on such grounds, or reemploy any person who has been separated from any Federal position on such grounds. The Director, CCHQ, administers the national security or suitability

investigation program and exercises program evaluation and oversight of the national security or suitability investigation program consistent with this Instruction.

Q. I am a supervisor. What do I do if a security check finds that one of my PHS officers is a potential security risk?

A. In most cases security will have informed others at your agency before contacting you. Supervisors should contact the Agency Liaison for further guidance. Supervisors also should review the officer's record in case anyone contacts you with questions.

Q. What happens if a PHS officer is delegated to an armed force or organization with stricter security rules?

A. Officers detailed to a component of the Armed Forces or other non-departmental organization must meet the national security and suitability investigation requirements listed in this Instruction and any additional requirements required by such organizations.