

# U.S. Secret Service Protection of Persons and Facilities: Homeland Security Issues in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress

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## Related Author

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- [Shawn Reese](#)
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Shawn Reese, Analyst in Emergency Management and Homeland Security Policy ([sreese@crs.loc.gov](mailto:sreese@crs.loc.gov), 7-0635)

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Congress has historically legislated and conducted oversight on the U.S. Secret Service (USSS) because of USSS' public mission of protecting individuals such as the President and his family, and the USSS mission of investigating financial crimes. Most recently, the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress conducted [oversight](#) on challenges facing the Service and held [hearings](#) on legislation that addressed costs associated with USSS protective detail operations and special agents' pay. These two issues remain pertinent in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress due to recent, but failed, attacks on USSS protectees, and the media's and public's attention on the cost the USSS incurs while protecting President Donald Trump and his family.

## USSS Protection Operations and Security Breaches

In October 2018, [attempted bombings](#) targeted former President Barack Obama, former Vice President Joe Biden, and former First Lady Hillary Clinton. Prior to these attempted attacks, the media [reported](#) other USSS security breaches, including two intruders (March and October 2017) climbing the White House fence, and the USSS losing a government laptop that contained blueprints and security plans for the Trump Tower in New York City. Various security breaches during President Obama's administrations resulted in several [congressional committee hearings](#).

Presidential safety is and has been a concern throughout the nation's history. For example, fears of kidnapping and assassination threats to Abraham Lincoln began with his journey to Washington, DC, for the inauguration in 1861. Ten Presidents have been victims of direct assaults by assassins, with four resulting in death. Since the USSS started protecting Presidents in 1906, seven assaults have occurred, with one resulting in death (President John F. Kennedy). [18 U.S.C. Section 3056\(a\)](#) explicitly identifies the following individuals authorized for USSS protection:

- President, Vice President, President- and Vice President-elect;
- immediate families of those listed above;
- former Presidents, their spouses, and their children under the age of 16;
- former Vice Presidents, their spouses, and their children under the age of 16;
- visiting heads of foreign states or governments;
- distinguished foreign visitors and official United States representatives on special missions abroad; and
- major presidential and vice presidential candidates within 120 days of the general presidential elections, and their spouses.

## USSS Protection Costs

Regardless of the location of protectees or costs associated with protective detail operations, the USSS is statutorily required to provide full-time security. Congress has reinforced this requirement in the past. In 1976, Congress required the USSS to not only secure the White House, but also the personal residences of the President and Vice President. However, the costs incurred by the USSS during the Trump Administration have generated interest and scrutiny. This includes the USSS leasing property from President Trump, and the frequency with which President Trump and his family have traveled.

[Reportedly](#), the USSS leased property in Trump Tower in New York City. The USSS informed CRS that leasing property from a protectee is not a new requirement with the Trump Administration, but the USSS would neither confirm nor deny leasing Trump Tower property. The USSS stated that it has leased a structure in the past at former Vice President Joe Biden's personal home in Delaware to conduct security operations. The USSS will not confirm if it is still leasing this property.

Another protection cost issue other than leasing property from protectees is the overall cost of protective detail operations. One aspect of protective detail operations that has garnered attention from the media and the public is President Trump's and his family's travel. Some question whether the President and his family have traveled more than other Presidents and their families and what, if any, impact that has on security costs. The security cost of this travel is difficult to assess, because the USSS is required to provide only annual budget justification information on "Protection of Persons and Facilities." The USSS does not provide specific costs related to individual presidential, or immediate family travel. The USSS states that it does not provide specific costs associated with protectee protection due to the information being a security concern.

## Conclusion

USSS security operations and the costs associated with these operations represent consistent issues of congressional concern. USSS protectees have been—and may continue to be—targeted by assassins. Congress may wish to consider USSS protection issues within this broader context as it conducts oversight and considers funding for the ever-evolving threats to USSS protectees and the rapidly changing technology used in USSS security operations.