GAO
Accountability * Integrity * Reliability
United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

December 4, 2000

The Honorable Sally Katzen
Chair, Chief Information Officers Council

Dear Ms. Katzen:

We commend the federal Chief Information Officers Council for encouraging agencies to routinely evaluate the status of their information security programs and for providing this Security Assessment Framework as a tool for facilitating such efforts. We appreciate having had an opportunity to participate in its initial development.

Ongoing self-assessments are an essential element of good management. Only by measuring progress and evaluating the effectiveness of policies and controls can management determine where improvements are needed. This is especially true for information security programs, where the effectiveness of efforts to reduce the risks of tampering, disruption, and inappropriate disclosure may not be immediately apparent.

This Security Assessment Framework is intended to be the foundation for a more detailed and complete set of tools that will include a series of questionnaires on specific areas of control, such as those pertaining to access and service continuity. We believe that these questionnaires will provide important specific guidance and, thus, will be essential to the framework's success.

Until these questionnaires are available, we encourage agency managers to begin using the criteria already identified in the framework and to provide comments on its usefulness to the CIO Council. By supporting the Security Assessment Framework in this manner, agencies can help ensure that it becomes a valuable tool and a basis for consistently evaluating the status of information security from a governmentwide perspective.

Sincerely yours,

Joel Willemssen
Managing Director, Information Technology Issues