## position description

# general counsel, national security agency

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| **OVERVIEW** | |
| Agency Mission | The National Security Agency (NSA)/Central Security Service leads the U.S. government in cryptology that encompasses both Signals Intelligence and Information Assurance products and services and enables computer network operations in order to gain a decision advantage for the nation and our allies under all circumstances.[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Overview | The NSA general counsel is an integral part of the NSA director’s senior leadership team, and as key advisor to NSA leadership at all levels. The general counsel also serves as the public legal face for the NSA. |
| Compensation | Up to $183,300.[[2]](#endnote-2) |
| Position Reports to | The NSA general counsel reports to the NSA director and is part of the broader Department of Defense general counsel’s office. |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** | |
| Management Scope | The general counsel oversees an office of approximately 100 attorneys and support staff.[[3]](#endnote-3) |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Serves as part of the NSA director’s senior leadership team, and as key advisor to NSA leadership at all levels. * Acts as the public legal face for the NSA. * Speaks at public events and participates in public legal panels. * Serves as the chief legal officer and as the final legal authority in NSA on all matters arising within or referred to NSA. * Is responsible for legal oversight of all NSA activities to ensure NSA operations are conducted lawfully. * Interacts with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Department of Justice and other general counsels of the intelligence community regarding legal issues that involve the intelligence community. * Interacts with the congressional committee counsel. * Interprets all statutes, presidential directives, and executive and legislative branch regulations, and provides legal advice and counsel to the director and senior leadership team. * Advises on all matters relating to the collection, retention, processing and dissemination of signals intelligence. information carried out by NSA or as part of the unified organization for signals intelligence activities that the director of NSA has established. * Provides legal reviews of NSA support to the U.S. Cyber Command, with particular emphasis on whether all such NSA support is properly authorized. * Conducts NSA's legislative initiative program, which may include drafting proposed legislation; developing the agency's position on pending legislation and executive orders; preparing reports to Congress on legislative proposals; and advising on implementation of new statutes. * Provides testimony at congressional hearings and special briefings to members of Congress and their staffs concerning any legal questions relating to NSA, as appropriate. * Builds partnerships with the public and private sectors and within the national security community to advance mission objectives.[[4]](#endnote-4) |
| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration.] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** | |
| Requirements | * Broad professional legal experience and authoritative knowledge of statutes, judicial decisions and executive branch regulations relating to national security.[[5]](#endnote-5) * Prior management experience involving legal practice (a plus). * Substantive knowledge or experience in national security law, surveillance, cybersecurity, civil liberties and privacy issues and the law of military operations. * Active license to practice law. |
| Competencies | * Originality, analytical ability and resourcefulness. * Ability to perform complex legal analysis. * Ability to give effective oral and written presentations. * Ability to forge working relationships with senior-level officials and clients. * Ability to effectively oversee a legal office and manage attorneys. * Ability to handle representational matters in controversy.[[6]](#endnote-6) |
| **PAST APPOINTEES** | |
| Michael J. Ellis (2021 to present) – Chief Counsel, Representative Devin Nunes; Associate Director, White House Office of Strategic Initiatives. | |
| Glenn Gerstell (2015 to 2020) - Member of D.C. Homeland Security Commission; Member of National Infrastructure Advisory Council; Managing Partner at Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy LLP.[[7]](#endnote-7) | |
| Rajesh De (2012 to 2015) - Staff Secretary and Deputy Assistant to the President; Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney at the Department of Justice; Counsel to the 9/11 Commission.[[8]](#endnote-8) | |

1. <https://www.nsa.gov/about/mission-strategy/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law 116-260, December 27 ,2020), contains a provision that continues the freeze on the payable pay rates for certain senior political officials through January 1, 2022. The compensation information is based on guidance from the Office of Personnel Management and can be accessed [here](https://www.chcoc.gov/content/continued-pay-freeze-certain-senior-political-officials-4#:~:text=Section%20748%20of%20division%20E,on%20December%2031%2C%202020%2C%20by). If you are selected for this position, please consult the agency’s HR representative for further guidance on compensation. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <http://lawjobs.com/job/general-counsel-national-security-agency-fort-meade-maryland-155269> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <http://lawjobs.com/job/general-counsel-national-security-agency-fort-meade-maryland-155269> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <http://lawjobs.com/job/general-counsel-national-security-agency-fort-meade-maryland-155269> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <http://lawjobs.com/job/general-counsel-national-security-agency-fort-meade-maryland-155269> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. https://www.nsa.gov/news-features/press-room/Article/1629033/nsa-announces-glenn-s-gerstell-as-new-general-counsel/ [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2015/03/17/nsas-top-lawyer-joins-private-sector/ [↑](#endnote-ref-8)