



February 2016

MILITARY ENLISTED AIDES

DOD's Report Met Most Statutory Requirements, but Aide Allocation Could Be Improved

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-239](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Enlisted aides assist general and flag officers with tasks, such as uniform care, that might otherwise interfere with accomplishing their official duties. Section 504 of the fiscal year 2015 NDAA required DOD to submit to Congress a report specifying enlisted aide duties and allocation procedures; justifying aide authorizations and assignments; recommending changes to the statutory method of calculating aide authorizations; and reducing the overall number of enlisted aides by 40.

The fiscal year 2015 NDAA also included a provision for GAO to review DOD's report. This report examines the extent to which (1) DOD's report on enlisted aides addressed statutory reporting requirements; (2) DOD's methodologies for identifying enlisted aide duties, allocating enlisted aides, and justifying their necessity are consistent with relevant statutes and DOD guidance; and (3) DOD used reliable data to support its report conclusions. GAO assessed DOD's June 2015 report against statutory requirements, compared methodologies against statute and DOD guidance, analyzed fiscal years 2014 and 2015 data on aide numbers, and interviewed DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD assess DOD-wide enlisted aide requirements, reallocate enlisted aide authorizations, establish criteria for determining enlisted aide workload, and establish a process for assessing the reliability of data in future enlisted aide reports. DOD concurred, but raised some concerns. GAO addresses these concerns in this report.

View [GAO-16-239](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov

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DOD's Report Met Most Statutory Requirements, but Aide Allocation Could Be Improved

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense's (DOD) June 2015 report on enlisted aides fully addressed five of the six statutory reporting requirements contained in section 504 of the Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2015 and partially addressed the remaining requirement. DOD's report addressed, among other things, the requirement to describe procedures for allocating enlisted aide authorizations, and the objective to reduce by 40 the maximum number of enlisted aides authorized and allocated. GAO determined that DOD partially addressed the requirement to justify enlisted aide authorizations on a billet-by-billet basis because DOD did not provide an explanation for each individual enlisted aide, and because some data were not from September 30, 2014, as was required.

DOD's methodology for identifying enlisted aide duties is consistent with guidance, and its methodology for allocating enlisted aides is consistent with relevant statute. However, DOD's methodologies for allocating and justifying aides are not consistent with all DOD guidance. DOD's stated methodology for allocating enlisted aide authorizations is consistent with the authorization formula and cap in 10 U.S.C. § 981 by first satisfying Joint Staff needs and then allocating the remaining authorizations among the military services according to a "fair share" percentage basis. However, this methodology is not based on validated personnel requirements, as DOD guidance requires, and DOD has not applied it to reallocate enlisted aide authorizations since 2010, resulting in a disproportionate distribution of authorizations. DOD officials stated that they have not assessed DOD-wide requirements in part due to the limited timeframe for developing DOD's report, and that they have not reallocated authorizations since 2010 because they were rewriting their enlisted aide guidance and anticipated changes to the statutory formula for determining enlisted aide authorizations. Without periodically assessing enlisted aide requirements and updating allocations, DOD cannot reasonably ensure that these resources are properly matched to its changing needs. In addition, the justifications included in DOD's report vary and are subjective, and it is unclear how duties and workload support enlisted aide assignments. For instance, a 4-star Joint Staff general hosts 150-200 official representational events per year and is assigned one enlisted aide, while a 3-star Army general hosts 3 events per year but is also assigned one aide. Without additional guidance to determine enlisted aide workload, military service and Joint Staff decisions regarding authorizations and assignments may not be consistent and transparent.

Certain data DOD used in its report were inaccurate or incomplete and therefore not reliable. For example, justification data from the Army, the Navy, and the Joint Staff did not reflect enlisted aide authorizations and assignments as of September 30, 2014, as was required. Also, several justifications did not align with the number of aides authorized or assigned to a general or flag officer billet. DOD officials stated they had no reason to doubt military service and Joint Staff data, but without a process for assessing reliability DOD does not have reasonable assurance that data it used to determine enlisted aide reductions were accurate, and Congress and senior DOD leaders may not have reliable data in future enlisted aide reports on which to base decisions on enlisted aides.

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Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
GFO	General and Flag Officer
NDA	National Defense Authorization Act
OUSD P&R	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness
USD P&R	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness

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February 22, 2016

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The U.S. military has been providing enlisted aides to officers since the Revolutionary War, and the Department of Defense (DOD) has reported that its enlisted aide program remains a vital tool in assisting general and flag officers (GFO) with meeting social requirements related to building partnerships and cultural and political ties throughout the world, as well as enhancing community relations.¹ Enlisted aides are a resource to assist GFOs with minor tasks—such as maintaining uniforms—that if performed by the officers themselves would be at the expense of the officers’ primary military and official duties and responsibilities. Congressional committees have previously raised questions over the costs of sustaining the GFO population—including those costs associated with enlisted aides²—and Congress has imposed a ceiling on the total number of enlisted personnel who may be assigned or detailed as enlisted aides on

¹ GFOs are the elite leaders of the U.S. military at the rank of brigadier general and above (for the Army, the Air Force, and the Marine Corps) and rear admiral and above (for the Navy).

² For example, see S. Rep. No. 113-85, at 11-12 (2013).

the personal staffs of GFOs.³ In September 2014, we found that the military services track the numbers and costs associated with enlisted aides to varying extents and recommended that DOD finalize a biannual reporting requirement related to the tracking of these aides within the department.⁴ DOD concurred with this recommendation and included a reporting requirement related to the tracking of enlisted aides in its updated enlisted aide instruction.⁵ Subsequently, section 504 of the Carl Levin and Howard P. “Buck” McKeon National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2015 required DOD to produce and submit to the Committees on Armed Services a series of reports on enlisted aides.⁶

DOD’s annual enlisted aide report, due no later than March 1 of each year, is to specify the number of enlisted aides authorized and allocated—as of September 30 of the previous year—to GFOs of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, and the Joint Staff, and to justify on a billet-by-billet basis the authorization and assignment of each enlisted aide to each GFO position. A second, one-time report, due no later than June 30, 2015, was to include a list of authorized and necessary official military and official representational duties for enlisted aides in the military services and the Joint Staff, procedures for allocating enlisted aides among and within the military services and the Joint Staff, a billet-by-billet justification for the authorization and assignment of each enlisted aide to each GFO position, and recommendations for changing the statutory method for calculating the authorized number of enlisted aides.⁷ Congress further directed DOD as an overall reporting objective to

³ See 10 U.S.C. § 981 (a) (b). The number of enlisted aides assigned or otherwise detailed to duty on the personal staffs of officers in the military services in a given fiscal year is limited to the lesser of (a) the sum of (1) four times the number of officers serving on active duty at the end of the preceding fiscal year in the grade of general or admiral and (2) two times the number of officers serving on active duty at the end of the preceding fiscal year in the grade of lieutenant general or vice admiral, or (b) 300 enlisted members at any given time. The statutory limit of 300 enlisted aides per fiscal year has not changed since October 1976.

⁴ GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Needs to Update General and Flag Officer Requirements and Improve Availability of Associated Costs*, [GAO-14-745](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 9, 2014).

⁵ See DOD Instruction 1315.09, *Utilization of Enlisted Aides (EAs) on Personal Staffs of General and Flag Officers (G/FOs)* (Mar. 6, 2015).

⁶ Pub. L. No. 113-291 (2014).

⁷ See Pub. L. No. 113-291 § 504 (a) and (b) (2014).

reduce by 40 the maximum number of enlisted aides authorized and allocated to GFOs, subject to a validation of duties and billet-by-billet justifications.⁸ DOD responded to this reporting requirement by submitting a report on June 30, 2015, to the congressional defense committees.

Section 504 of the NDAA for fiscal year 2015 also included a provision for us to review DOD's June 2015 enlisted aide report.⁹ This report examines the extent to which (1) DOD's report on enlisted aides addressed statutory reporting requirements; (2) DOD's methodologies for identifying enlisted aide duties, allocating enlisted aides, and justifying their necessity are consistent with relevant statutes and DOD guidance; and (3) DOD used reliable data to support its report conclusions.

For our first objective, we assessed DOD's report against the statutory reporting requirements in section 504 of the Fiscal Year 2015 NDAA to determine whether each requirement was fully addressed, partially addressed, or not addressed. To ensure accuracy, one GAO analyst conducted the initial review, and another analyst then reviewed each requirement. We determined that DOD's report fully addressed a statutory reporting requirement if it addressed each element of that requirement. We determined that DOD's report partially addressed a statutory reporting requirement if it addressed at least one—but not all—elements of a reporting requirement. We determined that DOD's report did not address a statutory reporting requirement if it did not address at least one element of the reporting requirement. Any disagreements in the coding were discussed and reconciled by the analysts, and all decisions were reviewed by a GAO attorney.

For our second objective, we reviewed steps taken by DOD, the military services, and the Joint Staff to produce report information against relevant statutes and DOD and military service guidance related to aide duties, allocation procedures, authorizations, and assignments. To assess the duties that are authorized and considered necessary for enlisted aides to perform, we compared the duties specified in DOD's report to DOD and military service guidance. This analysis was performed by one GAO analyst, who coded the information and entered it into a spreadsheet, and checked for accuracy by another analyst. Any

⁸ See Pub. L. No. 113-291 § 504 (c) (2014).

⁹ See Pub. L. No. 113-291 § 504 (d) (2014).

disagreements were reconciled by the analysts, and the analysis was then reviewed by an attorney.

To assess DOD's methodologies for describing enlisted aide allocation procedures between and within the military services and the Joint Staff, we compared the allocation procedures specified in DOD's report against sections 525, 526, and 981 of Title 10 of the United States Code and DOD and military service guidance. The analysis of allocation procedures was performed by one GAO analyst and reviewed by an attorney for accuracy. We interviewed officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSDP&R), each of the military services, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and enlisted aides from the Navy, to obtain additional information on enlisted aide duties as well as DOD's current approach to allocating aide authorizations.¹⁰ We compared DOD's current allocation practice to the procedures described in DOD's report as well as a DOD manpower management directive¹¹ and strategic human capital practices.¹² To assess DOD's methodology for the billet-by-billet justifications, we compared enlisted aide authorizations and assignments to those presented elsewhere in DOD's report and analyzed justifications against authorization and assignment criteria in DOD guidance related to manpower management and GFO housing and qualifying representational events.¹³ To ensure accuracy, each

¹⁰ The views expressed by these aides and the duties associated with their positions cannot be generalized to all enlisted aides within the Navy, the military services, or the Joint Staff. We toured the Vice Chief of Naval Operations' quarters at her invitation and spoke to the enlisted aides on-site, but did not interview enlisted aides from the other military services or the Joint Staff because interviewing enlisted aides was outside of the scope of our review.

¹¹ Department of Defense Directive 1100.4, *Guidance for Manpower Management* (Feb. 12, 2005).

¹² See GAO, *A Model of Strategic Human Capital Management*, [GAO-02-373SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 15, 2002). To develop this model, we reviewed sources, including lessons learned from public and private organizations that are viewed as leaders in strategic human capital management and management for results, in addition to findings from academia, the Office of Personnel Management, the Merit Systems Protection Board, and the National Academy of Public Administration.

¹³ Qualifying representational events are events hosted by GFOs that primarily serve to further the mission of the agency. Such events must be substantively related to the official performance of GFOs' military and other official duties and responsibilities, including representational duties associated with GFOs' assigned positions.

justification was reviewed by two GAO analysts, who discussed and reconciled any disagreements, and reviewed by a GAO methodologist.

For our third objective, we assessed the data supporting DOD's report conclusions related to aide reductions and changing the statutory method of calculating the maximum number of aide authorizations against internal control standards¹⁴ and leading practices for human capital management that relate to using reliable data to make decisions.¹⁵ Specifically, we analyzed fiscal years 2014 and 2015 GFO population data and enlisted aide authorization, assignment, and justification data from DOD's report to determine whether these data are complete and accurate, and compared these data to relevant data presented elsewhere in DOD's report and to data and information provided by the military services and the Joint Staff. These comparisons were conducted by one GAO analyst and checked for accuracy by a second analyst. We also interviewed officials from OUSD P&R, each of the military services, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to identify processes for collecting, maintaining, and reporting data and ensuring its accuracy and completeness, and to determine the extent to which military service and Joint Staff perspectives were factored into DOD's conclusions.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2015 to February 2016 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

¹⁴ See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.: November 1999). These standards were in effect prior to fiscal year 2016 and cover the time period of DOD's data in its June 2015 report to Congress. The standards were subsequently updated. The updated standards went into effect on October 1, 2015. See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 10, 2014).

¹⁵ [GAO-02-373SP](#).

Background

General and Flag Officers

GFOs are senior officers who are in the four ranks of brigadier general and above (for the Navy, rear admiral (lower half) and above), and have high-level interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational responsibilities. These officers plan and implement military operations by integrated military forces across the domains of land, sea, air, and space. Table 1 displays the pay grade, title of rank, and insignia worn by GFOs.

Table 1: Pay Grade, Rank, and Insignia Worn by General and Flag Officers

Pay grade	Rank		Insignia
	Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps	Navy	
O-10	General	Admiral	★★★★
O-9	Lieutenant general	Vice admiral	★★★
O-8	Major general	Rear admiral	★★
O-7	Brigadier general	Rear admiral (lower half)	★

Sources: 10 U.S.C. § 101(b) (4)-(5) and Department of Defense. | GAO-16-239

GFOs are subject to statutory limits and are assigned based on DOD's requirements. Congress established statutory limits on the number and distribution across each grade of GFOs for each of the military services and the Joint Staff, which are periodically revised.¹⁶ In fiscal year 2015, the statutory service-specific ceilings totaled 652 active duty GFOs for all services.¹⁷ In addition to the service-specific GFO positions, the statute also authorizes up to 310 GFO positions to be designated by the Secretary of Defense for joint duty positions.¹⁸ These latter positions are not included in the service ceilings. Also, certain GFO positions are exempt from the limitations, which allow the department to exceed

¹⁶ See 10 U.S.C. §§ 525 and 526 for the current limits.

¹⁷ 10 U.S.C. § 526.

¹⁸ 10 U.S.C. § 526(b). Joint duty assignments are defined by DOD as assignments to designated positions in a multiservice, joint, or multinational command or activity that is involved in the integrated employment or support of the land, sea, and air forces of at least two of the three military departments. Such involvement includes, but is not limited to, matters relating to national military strategy, joint doctrine and policy, strategic planning, contingency planning, and command and control of combat operations under a unified or specified command.

statutory limits on the numbers of GFOs. For example, GFOs on terminal leave immediately prior to retirement are generally exempt from statutory limits. Additionally, 10 U.S.C. § 527 provides the President with authority to suspend the statutory limits on GFO numbers in time of war or national emergency.¹⁹

Enlisted Aides

In the early days of the enlisted aide program, all commissioned officers were eligible to be assigned enlisted aides. In 1972, there were 1,915 enlisted aides authorized. In 1974, Congress began to impose ceilings on the authorized number of enlisted aides, and in 1976 reduced the ceiling to its current level of 300. Following the congressionally imposed reduction in 1974, DOD eliminated the assignment of enlisted aides to officers below the rank of GFO. Currently, enlisted aides are assigned to and support only authorized GFOs, not spouses, other family members, or staff of the GFO. Officers may also be detailed as officer aides to the personal staffs of GFOs.

Enlisted aide programs in the military services differ somewhat in terms of eligibility, military occupational specialty, and training. However, enlisted aides in each of the military services must be volunteers. Table 2 provides information related to enlisted aides in each of the military services in terms of eligibility, occupational specialty, and required training. Enlisted aides assigned to GFOs in the Joint Staff are drawn from the military services' pools and therefore reflect their respective services in terms of background and training, according to Joint Staff officials.

¹⁹ A national emergency was declared by President George W. Bush on September 14, 2001. See Executive Order 13224 (Sept.23, 2001). This declaration has been continued each year, with the latest continuation communicated by President Barack Obama on September 18, 2015.

Table 2: Enlisted Aides in Each of the Military Services

	Eligibility	Occupational Specialty	Training
Army	All enlisted military occupational codes in the rank of sergeant (E-5) and above.	Primarily Food Service Specialists	Prior to assignment, enlisted aides complete an advanced culinary skills course and an enlisted aide training course covering topics such as meal planning, hosting representational events, and uniform maintenance.
Air Force	All enlisted personnel specialty codes in the rank of staff sergeant (E-5), technical sergeant (E-6), and master sergeant/first sergeant (E-7).	Primarily Medics, Maintainers, Services, and Security Forces personnel.	After assignment, enlisted aides complete a 3-tiered program including culinary, food safety, and home management courses.
Navy	Culinary specialists in the ranks of petty officer 2nd class (E-5) and above.	Culinary specialists	Prior to assignment, enlisted aides complete an advanced culinary skills training course and an enlisted aide training course covering topics such as household management, financial administration, uniform maintenance, and official entertainment protocol.
Marine Corps	Food service specialists in the ranks of corporal (E-4), sergeant (E-5), staff sergeant (E-6), and gunnery sergeant (E-7).	Food Service Specialists. After assignment, enlisted aides are given a Marine Aide designation.	Prior to assignment, enlisted aides complete an advanced culinary skills training course and an enlisted aide training course covering topics such as household management, financial administration, uniform maintenance, and official entertainment protocol.

Source: GAO analysis of Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps information. | GAO-16-239

Enlisted Aide Duties

The duties of enlisted aides relate to the military and other official duties and responsibilities of GFOs, to include assisting GFOs in discharging the DOD representational responsibilities associated with their positions. Official representational duties are those assigned duties and responsibilities that serve to uphold the standing and prestige of the United States and DOD through the extension of official courtesies to authorized officials and dignitaries of the United States and foreign countries. The propriety of enlisted aide duties is governed by the official purpose that they serve rather than the nature of the duties.

Some examples of enlisted aide duties include (1) maintaining the care of GFO military uniforms; (2) planning, preparing, and conducting qualifying representational events; (3) purchasing and preparing meals for GFOs during the enlisted aides' normal duty work schedules; (4) performing general yard maintenance, including lawn care; and (5) accomplishing tasks that aid the GFO in the performance of his or her military or other official duties and responsibilities, including certain related errands. Activities that do not have a substantive connection to the GFOs' military or other official duties and responsibilities or that contribute solely to the

personal benefit of the GFO or their family members are explicitly unauthorized. These include activities such as pet care, caregiving, maintenance of privately owned recreational or sport equipment, and care or cleaning in military housing that contributes solely to the personal benefit of the GFO or the GFO's dependents, such as making beds and cleaning private areas. Appendix I provides additional information regarding the official military and representational duties authorized and unauthorized by DOD guidance, as well as some of the additional duties authorized by the military services.

Authorization and Assignment of Enlisted Aides

Section 981 of Title 10 of the United States Code places a ceiling on the total number of enlisted personnel who may be assigned or otherwise detailed as enlisted aides on the personal staffs of GFOs.²⁰ The DOD enlisted aide ceiling is determined in accordance with section 981 or set at a lower number as determined by the USD P&R. A DOD instruction requires that enlisted aides be allocated to the military services only after consideration is given to the Joint pool requirements and that military service allocations be computed based on a percentage of the DOD enlisted aide ceiling.²¹ Within the military services and the Joint Staff, authorizations are based on whether the official duties and responsibilities of the GFO position, including representational duties, warrant enlisted aide support—not solely on grade or title of the GFO.

A DOD instruction also provides rules for the assignment and use of enlisted aides. For example, to be eligible for the assignment of an enlisted aide, a GFO must occupy qualifying military housing or reside in off-base quarters arranged for the GFO outside the continental United

²⁰The number of enlisted aides assigned or otherwise detailed to duty on the personal staffs of officers in the military services in a given fiscal year is limited to the lesser of (a) the sum of (1) four times the number of officers serving on active duty at the end of the preceding fiscal year in the grade of general or admiral and (2) two times the number of officers serving on active duty at the end of the preceding fiscal year in the grade of lieutenant general or vice admiral, or (b) 300 enlisted members at any given time .

²¹ The Joint pool allocation is taken from the overall DOD allocation before enlisted aides are allocated to the military services.

Roles and Responsibilities for Managing Enlisted Aides

States.²² Also, only a GFO who is authorized an enlisted aide may use an enlisted aide, unless a GFO who is not authorized an enlisted aide is representing the GFO who is authorized an enlisted aide at a qualifying representational event. The sharing or loaning of enlisted aides to another GFO who is serving in a position authorized the use of an enlisted aide is permitted in order to support a qualifying representational event. In the event that an enlisted aide is loaned to another GFO, the duty hours of the enlisted aide may be adjusted to support the qualifying representational event. According to OUSD P&R officials, geographic proximity is a key factor considered in approving the sharing or loaning of enlisted aides in support of qualifying representational events.

DOD Instruction 1315.09 establishes policy and assigns responsibilities for the managing of enlisted aides.²³ Such responsibilities are assigned to the USD P&R, the Secretaries of the Military Departments, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. USD P&R is responsible for establishing and publishing the enlisted aide ceiling and determining military service and Joint Staff enlisted allocations. USD P&R also prepares the annual enlisted aide report required by section 981 of Title 10 of the United States Code. The Secretary of each military department is responsible for, among other things, implementing DOD's enlisted aide instruction within their respective military department; determining the specific GFO positions to be authorized enlisted aides; and determining the specific number of enlisted aides to be assigned to each GFO position within their respective military service allocations. The Secretaries are also responsible for providing to the USD P&R copies of reports reflecting enlisted aide authorizations, allocations, and justifications for the authorizations based on duties and responsibilities of GFO positions from the previous fiscal year. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff similarly determines, among other things, which GFO positions are to be authorized enlisted aides and the number of enlisted aides to be assigned to each GFO position within the joint duty authorizations.

²² See DOD Instruction 1315.09, *Utilization of Enlisted Aides (EAs) on Personal Staffs of General and Flag Officers (G/FOs)* (Mar. 6, 2015) referencing DOD Manual 4165.63-M, *DOD Housing Management* (Oct. 28, 2010). This manual defines military housing as including both DOD housing and privatized housing. DOD housing is property that DOD owns, leases, obtains by permit, or otherwise acquires. Privatized housing is constructed by an eligible entity but is not DOD-owned.

²³ DOD Instruction 1315.09, *Utilization of Enlisted Aides (EAs) on Personal Staffs of General and Flag Officers (G/FOs)* (Mar. 6, 2015).

Various organizations within the military services and the Joint Staff manage enlisted aides, according to military service and Joint Staff officials. In the Army, the Office of the Director of Army Staff serves as the proponent of the program and manages the enlisted aide selection and assignment processes. Additionally, the Army Human Resources Command manages enlisted aide orders, and the Joint Culinary Center of Excellence trains future enlisted aides. In the Air Force, an enlisted aide Program Manager in the Air Force General Officer Management Office manages the enlisted aide program. In the Navy, the Navy Personnel Command is responsible for the recruitment and assignment of enlisted aides; the Chief of the Navy Supply Corps Command has overall responsibility for enlisted aide training; the Navy Flag Matters Office determines quotas and overall enlisted aide allocations; and the Chief of Naval Operations and Vice Chief of Naval Operations determine which flag officers receive enlisted aides. In the Marine Corps, the Enlisted Aide Program Office is responsible for most aspects of the enlisted aide program, including the recruitment, training, and assignment of enlisted aides. To execute these responsibilities, this Office also coordinates with the Marine Corps' Logistics Office and the Manpower and Reserve Affairs Department. In the Joint Staff, the General and Flag Officer Management Office manages enlisted aide authorizations, and the Manpower and Personnel Directorate provides limited administrative support to enlisted aides assigned to the Joint Staff.

Guidance on the Use of Enlisted Aides

DOD Instruction 1315.09 is the principal document governing the management and use of enlisted aides. In March 2015, DOD completed an update to this instruction, which was last issued in October 2007. OUSD P&R officials described this update as the most significant update to the enlisted aide program in the last 25 to 30 years, noting that it was comprehensive, and that it clarified many aspects of the enlisted aide program, including authorized duties. Among other things, the March 2015 version modified the department's procedures for allocating enlisted aide authorizations across the military services and the Joint Staff; updated the definition of enlisted aide management responsibilities for the USD P&R, the secretaries of the military departments, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; modified requirements for reporting on enlisted aide authorizations, allocations, and justifications; and provided a list of authorized and unauthorized enlisted aide duties, along with illustrative examples. The new version of DOD Instruction 1315.09 also defined what constitutes a "qualifying representational event" and provides for the sharing or loaning of enlisted aides between GFOs, as discussed above.

DOD's Report on Enlisted Aides Fully Addressed Most Statutory Reporting Requirements

DOD's June 2015 enlisted aide report fully addressed five of the six statutory reporting requirements contained in section 504 of the Fiscal Year 2015 NDAA and partially addressed the remaining requirement.²⁴ DOD's report addressed requirements related to (1) submitting the report, (2) listing official military and representational duties that enlisted aides are authorized to perform, (3) describing procedures for allocating enlisted aide authorizations between and within the military services and the Joint Staff, (4) recommending changes to the statutory method of calculating enlisted aide authorizations, and (5) the objective of reducing by 40 the maximum number of enlisted aides authorized and allocated, subject to certain conditions. DOD partially addressed the requirement to justify enlisted aide authorizations and assignments on a billet-by-billet basis. Table 3 summarizes our assessment of the extent to which DOD's report addressed the statutory reporting requirements.

Table 3: GAO's Assessment of the Extent to Which the Department of Defense's (DOD) June 2015 Enlisted Aides Report Addressed Statutory Reporting Requirements

Statutory requirement	GAO assessment	GAO comments
Submit a report to the Committees on Armed Services by June 30, 2015.	Fully Addressed	DOD submitted its report to the Senate and House Committees on Armed Services on June 30, 2015.
Include a list of official military and official representational duties that each Secretary of a military department authorizes enlisted aides to perform and considers necessary to be performed by enlisted aides to relieve officers from minor duties, which, if performed by the officers, would be done at the expense of the officers' primary military or official duties.	Fully Addressed	DOD's report contains lists of official military and official representational duties that are authorized and considered necessary for enlisted aides to perform in each military service. The report states that the lists are not exhaustive and the lists do not distinguish between those duties that are authorized and those that are considered necessary. The report also notes that every duty on the lists is not conducted by every enlisted aide.
Include the procedures used for allocating authorized enlisted aides: between the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps and the joint pool; within each armed force, including relevant regulations; and within the joint pool.	Fully Addressed	The report describes DOD's procedures for allocating enlisted aide authorizations among the military services and the Joint Staff and provides information on how enlisted aides are allocated within each military service and the Joint Staff, along with associated regulations. The Army, the Air Force, and the Joint Staff cite DOD Instruction 1315.09 as the controlling document for enlisted aide allocations, while the Navy and the Marine Corps describe their processes for allocating enlisted aides.

²⁴ See Pub. L. No. 113-291 § 504 (b)-(c).

Statutory requirement	GAO assessment	GAO comments
Include the justification, on a billet-by-billet basis, for the authorization and assignment of each enlisted aide to each general and flag officer position as of September 30, 2014.	Partially Addressed	The report contains justifications for the authorization and assignment of enlisted aides to GFO positions in the military services and the Joint Staff. The justifications generally describe how a specified number of enlisted aides authorized or assigned to each general and flag officer position would support that position. However, the justifications do not provide an explanation for each individual enlisted aide, and officials from the Army, the Navy, and the Joint Staff told us that justifications for their organizations were not from September 30, 2014.
Include such recommendations as the Secretary of Defense considers appropriate for changes to the statutory method of calculating the authorized number of enlisted aides.	Fully Addressed	DOD recommended in its report that 10 U.S.C. § 981 be changed to authorize a specific number of enlisted aides (252), similar to the statutory authorizations for the number of GFOs.
In developing the report, the Secretary of Defense shall have the objective of reducing the maximum number of enlisted aides authorized and allocated for general officers and flag officers by 40, subject to the validation of duties and the billet-by-billet justification of positions.	Fully Addressed	DOD's recommendation to reduce the statutory cap on enlisted aides from 300 to 252 represents a proposed reduction of 48 enlisted aide allocations. DOD's report states that this number was based on reviews by each military service and the Joint Staff and additional input from members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Source: Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, Pub. L. No. 113-261 § 504 and GAO analysis of DOD information. | GAO-16-239

DOD's Report Methodologies Are Consistent with Relevant Statute, but Some Are Not Consistent with All DOD Guidance

DOD's methodology for identifying enlisted aide duties in its report to Congress is consistent with guidance, and its methodology for allocating enlisted aides is consistent with relevant statute. However, DOD's methodologies for allocating and justifying enlisted aides are not consistent with all DOD guidance.

DOD's Report Identified Enlisted Aide Duties Consistent with Relevant Guidance

Our review found that the official military and representational duties identified in DOD's report as authorized and considered necessary for enlisted aides to perform in each of the military services are consistent with enlisted aide duties and parameters on their use specified in DOD or military service guidance.²⁵ DOD and military service guidance explicitly authorize and prohibit certain activities.²⁶ For example, DOD Instruction 1315.09 authorizes enlisted aides to maintain areas of military housing used for qualifying representational events but prohibits enlisted aides from performing care or cleaning duties in military housing that contribute solely to the personal benefit of GFOs and their dependents, such as making beds, cleaning private areas, and organizing personal effects. Similarly, DOD Instruction 1315.09 authorizes enlisted aides to perform general yard maintenance, to include lawn care and removing debris and litter, but prohibits enlisted aides from performing landscaping or grounds-keeping activities—such as trimming trees and planting flowers—in areas not commonly used for qualifying representational events. To compile each military service list for the June 2015 report, OUSD P&R recommended that the military services use the duties specified in DOD Instruction 1315.09 as a starting point and that they add any additional service activities. Officials from the Army, the Air Force, and the Marine Corps stated that they used either DOD or military service guidance to compile their lists, while officials from the Navy stated that they conducted polling of enlisted aides and the flag officers who use them.

²⁵ For example, see DOD Instruction 1315.09, *Utilization of Enlisted Aides (EAs) on Personal Staffs of General and Flag Officers (G/FOs)* (Mar. 6, 2015); Air Force Instruction 36-2123, *Management of Enlisted Aides* (Oct. 2, 2008); Army Regulation 614-200, *Enlisted Assignments and Utilization Management* (Feb. 26, 2009, Incorporating Change Oct. 11, 2011); Secretary of the Navy Instruction 1306.2D, *Utilization of Enlisted Aides on Personal Staffs* (Dec. 22, 2005); and Marine Corps, *Marine Enlisted Aide Handbook* (June 2015).

²⁶ There are also some statutory restrictions governing the use of enlisted aides. Specifically, sections 3639 and 8639 of Title 10 of the United States Code prohibit the use of any enlisted servicemember as a "servant" in the Army and the Air Force, respectively. Also, section 7579 of Title 10 of the United States Code provides, among other things, that under regulations prescribed by the Secretary of the Navy, enlisted members in the Navy may be assigned to duty in a service capacity in officers' messes and public quarters when the Secretary finds such use to be desirable for military purposes. We did not assess whether the enlisted aide duties specified in DOD's report are consistent with these restrictions because the restrictions do not define what constitutes servitude in the context of enlisted aide use.

Officials we spoke with from the military services and the Joint Staff generally agreed that the duties specified in DOD Instruction 1315.09 are sufficient to guide enlisted aide activities and that necessary activities can differ depending on individual GFO responsibilities or preferences. These officials also cited existing mechanisms, such as the use of ethics counselors, as being sufficient to determine whether activities not specified in DOD's guidance are permitted. Enlisted aides we spoke with from the Navy similarly agreed that, while they must sometimes exercise judgment in determining whether an activity is acceptable, there is a resource for them to use to obtain clarification on whether or not a particular activity is authorized. Appendix I provides additional information regarding the official military and representational duties authorized and unauthorized by DOD guidance, as well as some of the additional duties authorized by the military services.

DOD's Stated Methodology for Allocating Enlisted Aides Is Consistent with the Relevant Statute, but It Is Not Based on Personnel Requirements, and DOD Has Not Reallocated Aides Since 2010

DOD describes in its report a methodology for allocating enlisted aide authorizations across the military services and the Joint Staff that is consistent with relevant statute, but we found that DOD's methodology is not based on personnel requirements. Further, DOD has not applied its stated methodology to reallocate enlisted aide authorizations since 2010.

DOD's Allocation Methodology Is Consistent with the Relevant Statute

DOD's stated methodology for allocating enlisted aide authorizations across the military services and the Joint Staff is consistent with 10 U.S.C. § 981, which limits enlisted aide numbers. Under 10 U.S.C. § 981, the number of enlisted aides assigned or otherwise detailed to duty on the personal staffs of officers in the military services in a given fiscal year is limited to the lesser of (a) the sum of (1) four times the number of officers serving on active duty at the end of the preceding fiscal year in the grade of general or admiral and (2) two times the number of officers serving on active duty at the end of the preceding fiscal year in the grade of

lieutenant general or vice admiral, or (b) 300 enlisted members at any given time.²⁷

DOD's stated methodology is to distribute enlisted aide authorizations under the cap established by section 981(b) by first satisfying Joint Staff needs and then distributing the authorizations remaining under the statutory cap on a "fair share" percentage basis predicated on the formula in section 981(a). Specifically, according to OUSD P&R officials, DOD's stated methodology is to use the 981(a) formula to determine what each military service's maximum authorization would be if not for the DOD-wide 300-aide cap and then provide each military service with approximately the same percentage of its hypothetical maximum enlisted aide authorization. Officials from OUSD P&R stated that the intent is to provide each military service with a percentage of its maximum authorization that is within 2 percentage points of the other military services' allocations in relation to their own maximum authorizations. For example, in a given year, each military service may receive between 65 percent and 67 percent of its hypothetical maximum authorization according to the section 981(a) formula. Because DOD's stated methodology is based on the formula in section 981(a)—which provides that authorizations change as the number of active duty 3-star and 4-star GFOs changes—hypothetical maximum authorizations may change from year-to-year. The application of the section 981(a) formula to allocation among the military services, combined with the assignment of enlisted aides to the Joint Staff, results in the full statutory limit of 300 enlisted aides being assigned that year.

DOD's Allocation Methodology Is Not Based on Enlisted Aide Personnel Requirements, and DOD Has Not Reallocated Enlisted Aides Since 2010

DOD's methodology for allocating enlisted aide authorizations across the military services and the Joint Staff is not based on validated personnel requirements, and DOD has not applied its methodology to reallocate enlisted aide authorizations since 2010. DOD guidance for personnel management requires, among other things, that military and civilian personnel resources (1) be programmed in accordance with validated requirements and (2) be based on policies and procedures that are periodically evaluated.²⁸ In addition, leading practices for strategic human capital management state that high-performing organizations periodically evaluate their human capital practices to ensure that resources are

²⁷ See 10 U.S.C. § 981 (a) (b).

²⁸ DOD Directive 1100.4, *Guidance for Manpower Management* (Feb. 12, 2005).

properly matched to the needs of today’s environment.²⁹ As previously noted, DOD’s stated methodology for allocating enlisted aides is to satisfy Joint Staff needs and then distribute the authorizations remaining under the statutory cap of 300 aides on a “fair share” percentage basis according to the formula in 10 U.S.C. § 981(a)—which bases maximum authorizations on the number of 3-star and 4-star GFOs on active duty in the previous fiscal year.

DOD’s stated methodology does not account for enlisted aide requirements. For example, it does not align with the military services’ and the Joint Staff’s practice of assigning enlisted aides to 1-star and 2-star GFOs. Additionally, OUSD P&R officials stated that the Joint Staff allocation fully addresses Joint Staff enlisted aide needs, but Joint Staff officials told us that their allocation has not changed since 2009 and that it was based on the number of 3-star and 4-star GFOs in the Joint Staff at that time.³⁰ According to OUSD P&R officials, the department has not conducted an assessment of DOD-wide enlisted aide requirements in part due to the limited timeframe it had to develop DOD’s enlisted aide report and in part because an objective of the report was to reduce enlisted aides by 40, subject to certain conditions, and a requirements assessment would likely demonstrate a need for additional enlisted aides.

In addition to not basing its stated methodology on validated enlisted aide requirements, DOD has not applied its methodology to reallocate its enlisted aide authorizations since 2010, resulting in a disproportionate distribution of authorizations in relation to the military services’ hypothetical maximum authorizations under section 981(a). For example, in fiscal year 2010, DOD allocated the Army (81 of 122) and the Marine Corps (21 of 32) approximately 66 percent of their hypothetical maximum enlisted aide authorizations under DOD’s fair share methodology. By fiscal year 2014, a lower number of active duty 3-star and 4-star GFOs in

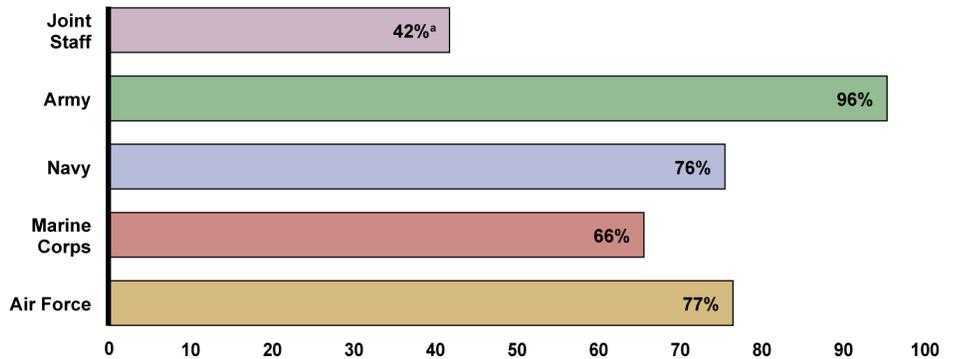
²⁹ See GAO, *A Model of Strategic Human Capital Management*, [GAO-02-373SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 15, 2002). To develop this model, we reviewed sources, including lessons learned from public and private organizations that are viewed as leaders in strategic human capital management and managing for results, in addition to findings from academia, the Office of Personnel Management, the Merit Systems Protection Board, and the National Academy of Public Administration.

³⁰ To help address Joint Staff enlisted aide needs, the Army had authorized four of its enlisted aides to joint GFO billets and held one of its authorizations for emerging joint GFO billets requiring enlisted aide support. In addition, the Navy and the Marine Corps each had assigned one of its enlisted aides to a joint commander.

the Army in the preceding fiscal year had caused the Army's hypothetical maximum authorization to drop from 122 to 84, while the Marine Corps' remained at 32. However, OUSD P&R kept the allocations for the Army (81) and Marine Corps (21) the same as in fiscal year 2010, resulting in the Army receiving approximately 96 percent of its hypothetical maximum authorization for fiscal year 2014. OUSD P&R officials told us that they have not reallocated enlisted aide authorizations since 2010 because they were revising their primary enlisted aide instruction and because they anticipated changes to the statutory formula for determining maximum enlisted aide authorizations.³¹ Figure 1 depicts the Joint Staff's and each of the military services fiscal year 2014 allocations—unchanged since the fiscal year 2010 allocation—under the statutory cap in relation to its hypothetical maximum authorizations in fiscal year 2014, according to the formula in 10 U.S.C. §981(a).

³¹ Department of Defense Instruction 1315.09, *Utilization of Enlisted Aides (EAs) on Personal Staffs of General and Flag Officers (G/FOs)* (Mar. 6, 2015).

Figure 1: Fiscal Year 2014 Joint Staff and Military Service Enlisted Aide Allocations by Percentage of Hypothetical Maximum Authorizations per 10 U.S.C § 981(a)



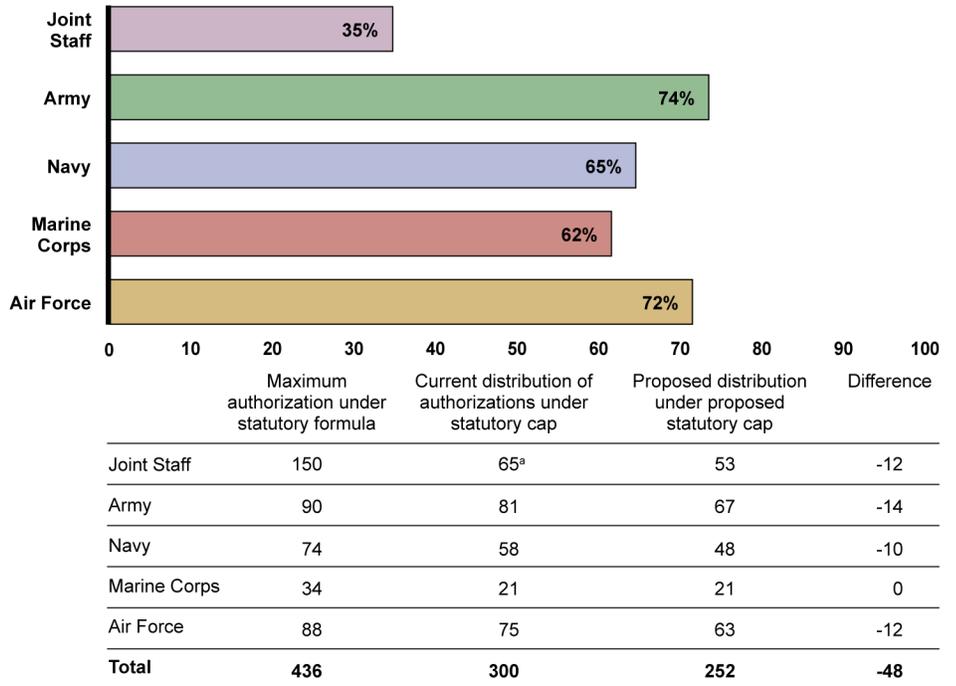
	Maximum authorization under statutory formula	Current distribution of authorizations under statutory cap
Joint Staff	154	65
Army	84	81
Navy	76	58
Marine Corps	32	21
Air Force	98	75
Total	444	300

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-16-239

^aAccording to OUSD P&R officials, this allocation fulfills all Joint Staff enlisted aide needs. Joint Staff officials told us that their allocation has not changed since 2009 and that it was based on the number of 3-star and 4-star GFOs in the Joint Staff at that time.

As previously mentioned, DOD’s report calls for the reduction of 48 enlisted aides and for lowering the statutory cap of enlisted aides from 300 to 252. Specifically, DOD’s proposal would reduce the number of enlisted aides in the Navy, the Army, the Air Force, and the Joint Staff by between 10 and 14 positions each; the Marine Corps would not be affected. According to an OUSD P&R official, the proposed reductions would be made gradually over a 3-year period so as to not disrupt the military services’ abilities to support GFOs and maintain the needed number of enlisted aides. Figure 2 shows DOD’s proposed allocation of enlisted aide authorizations under its proposed cap of 252 aides.

Figure 2: DOD’s Proposed Military Service and Joint Staff Enlisted Aide Allocations in Relation to Fiscal Year 2016 Hypothetical Maximum Authorizations per 10 U.S.C. § 981(a)



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-16-239

^aAccording to OUSD P&R officials, this allocation fulfills all Joint Staff enlisted aide needs. Joint Staff officials told us that their allocation has not changed since 2009 and that it was based on the number of 3- and 4-star GFOs in the Joint Staff at that time.

According to DOD’s June report, the proposed reduction was based on extensive reviews of the billet-by-billet justifications by each military service and the Joint Staff and additional input from members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Additionally, an OUSD P&R official stated that the billet-by-billet justification process now in place for its annual enlisted aide reports may create future opportunities to adjust military service allocations. However, the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2015 required billet-by-billet justifications for enlisted aide authorizations and assignments as of September 30, 2014—not total enlisted aide requirements. Additionally, DOD’s proposed enlisted aide reduction and allocation were based on its existing “fair share” allocation, which has not been updated since 2010 and does not include an assessment of total DOD-wide enlisted aide requirements.

OUSD P&R officials stated that the military services expressed support for receiving the proposed standard cap of enlisted aides over basing allocations on requirements because it would provide continuity in year-to-year planning. Officials we spoke with from the Army, the Air Force, and the Joint Staff confirmed their preference for a standard cap on the number of enlisted aides allocated to their organizations, but officials from the Navy and the Marine Corps stated that they would prefer a requirements-based approach that better reflects service-level enlisted aide needs. Specifically, Navy officials told us that they did not concur with the department's proposed reduction and allocation because they were based on the current enlisted aide allocation methodology—which is not consistent with how the military services assign enlisted aides—and because they focused on justifying current inventories and reducing overall numbers instead of assessing requirements. Similarly, an official from the Marine Corps stated that enlisted aide requirements should be considered when determining enlisted aide allocations and that DOD should quantify its enlisted aide needs.

OUSD P&R officials stated that they are continuing to operate under the existing statutory cap of 300 enlisted aides for fiscal year 2016, as well as the same allocation of enlisted aides across the Joint Staff and the military services. These officials noted also that all options are under review for the next allocation and that they anticipate congressional input to that process. As noted, the current statutory enlisted aide cap of 300 has been in place since 1976, at which point GFO authorizations stood at 1,141. Since that time, GFO authorizations have fallen to 962 in fiscal year 2015, thus increasing the ratio of enlisted aides to GFOs. At the same time, in recent years, DOD has created new organizations, such as U.S. Cyber Command (2010) and the Defense Health Agency (2013), which require additional GFOs for senior leadership positions. The U.S. military has also reduced its presence in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, but emerging challenges may continue to affect the level and location of enlisted aide support needed to assist GFOs with meeting their responsibilities related to building partnerships and ties throughout the world. Such changes suggest that the current allocation and fair share methodology may not be in line with actual enlisted aide requirements. Without an assessment of enlisted aide requirements and periodic reallocations of enlisted aide authorizations under the statutory cap, the department cannot reasonably ensure that these resources are properly matched to the needs of today's environment by equitably distributing them across the military services and the Joint Staff and ensuring their efficient and effective use.

Military Service and Joint Staff Justifications for Allocating Enlisted Aides Vary and Are Subjective

Military service and Joint Staff justifications for enlisted aide authorizations and assignments vary and are subjective, and it is unclear how duties and workload support enlisted aide assignments, particularly in cases where more than one enlisted aide is assigned to a single GFO. DOD guidance for personnel management states that personnel requirements should be driven by workload and established at the minimum levels necessary to accomplish mission and performance objectives.³² DOD's enlisted aide guidance generally requires that GFOs reside in military housing in order to be assigned an enlisted aide and describes enlisted aide duties as relating principally to maintaining the care and cleanliness of GFO military housing and supporting qualifying representational events.³³ This guidance states also that the military services and the Joint Staff should only authorize enlisted aides if the official duties of the GFO position, including representational duties, warrant enlisted aide support and that enlisted aide authorizations should not be based solely on grade or title of a GFO position. OUSD P&R instructed the military services and the Joint Staff to cite, to the extent possible, the number of qualifying representational events and the size of military housing used for hosting qualifying representational events when developing their justifications for the June 2015 report.³⁴ The billet-by-billet justifications in DOD's report commonly cited qualifying representational events and GFO housing as reasons for enlisted aide authorizations or assignments, but they did so inconsistently. For example,

³² DOD Directive 1100.4, *Guidance for Manpower Management* (Feb. 12, 2005).

³³ GFOs outside the continental United States in off-base quarters may also be eligible to be assigned enlisted aides. See DOD Instruction 1315.09, *Utilization of Enlisted Aides (EAs) on Personal Staffs of General and Flag Officers (G/FOs)* (Mar. 6, 2015).

³⁴ OUSD P&R officials stated that although they instructed the military services and the Joint Staff to cite the number of qualifying representational events, the billet-by-billet justifications in DOD's report were based on the policies in place on September 30, 2014, not the new policies outlined in the March 2015 version of DOD Instruction 1315.09. These officials also noted that some of the GFOs who were previously authorized and allocated enlisted aides are no longer authorized enlisted aides based upon the revised Instruction. As previously discussed, the revised Instruction defines what constitutes a qualifying representational event, among other things.

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- Justifications varied in whether they explicitly addressed GFO military housing, qualifying representational events, or both.
 - Justifications covering 289 of 290 assigned enlisted aides across the military services and the Joint Staff mentioned enlisted aide duties associated with qualifying representational events, but justifications covering 78 enlisted aide assignments either did not discuss housing or referenced it indirectly by discussing duties associated with areas used for qualifying representational events, which can be hosted inside or outside of the home, according to OUSD P&R officials.³⁵
 - Justifications varied in whether they quantified the size of GFO military housing or number of qualifying representational events.
 - Justifications for 76 of the Army's 79 enlisted aide assignments specified the square footage of GFO housing, but justifications for 5 of 58 Navy enlisted aide assignments and 2 of 57 Joint Staff enlisted aide assignments specified the square footage of GFO housing.
 - All 75 of the Air Force's assignment justifications specified the number of qualifying representational events held annually by the GFO, while the Joint Staff specified this number in 41 of its 57 assignment justifications.
 - Justifications varied in how they supported enlisted aide assignments based on the size of GFO military housing or the number of qualifying representational events.
 - Within the Army, two 4-star generals were each assigned two enlisted aides, though one hosts 128 qualifying representational events per year and resides in an 8,500-square-foot home, while the other hosts 65 qualifying representational events and resides in a 4,912-square-foot home. Similarly, two 2-star Army generals were assigned one enlisted aide each, though one hosted 144 qualifying representational events and resided in a 3,957-square-foot home, and the other hosted 8 qualifying representational events and resided in a 3,429-square-foot home.

³⁵ As previously discussed, GFOs must generally reside in government housing to be eligible for an enlisted aide assignment.

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- Within the Air Force, two 1-star generals were assigned one enlisted aide each, though one hosts approximately 10 events per year and resides in a 2,297-square-foot house, and the other hosts 72 qualifying representational events per year and resides in an 11,000-square-foot house.
 - A 4-star general assigned to the Joint Staff hosts 150-200 qualifying representational events per year and is assigned one enlisted aide, while an Army 3-star general hosts 3 qualifying representational events per year but is also assigned one enlisted aide.
 - A 3-star Army general who resides in a 16,000-square-foot home has two assigned enlisted aides, while a 4-star general officer assigned to the Joint Staff resides in a 3,115-square-foot home but also has two enlisted aides.

OUSD P&R officials stated that they did not use specific criteria—such as quantitative thresholds—to assess the sufficiency of justifications submitted for DOD’s June report and that authorization and assignment decisions are subjective. An OUSD P&R official also stated that each of the military services quantifies its enlisted aide needs differently, thus complicating comparisons of military service justifications. Citing the subjective nature of these decisions, officials from two of the military services stated that there is a need for additional criteria for determining enlisted aide authorizations or assignments. For example, Navy officials stated that authorization and assignment determinations should be based on factors such as the square footage of military housing, maintenance hours, and the quantification and qualification (type of event and number of attendees) of qualifying representational events. Similarly, a Marine Corps official told us that the Marine Corps had proposed a working group comprising military service representatives to identify weighted criteria for the purpose of informing enlisted aide authorization and assignment decisions.

An OUSD P&R official stated that in developing the June 2015 report OUSD P&R had considered developing a formula to help guide enlisted aide authorization and assignment decisions but that doing so proved to be too complicated because of the range of decisions that would have to be made on the selection and weighting of potential criteria, such as the number and nature of qualifying representational events, the square footage of military housing, and GFO responsibilities. OUSD P&R officials also stated that the revised DOD Instruction 1315.09 addressed the need for criteria for determining enlisted aide requirements, for example by

tying authorization and assignment determinations to official representational duties. However, DOD's Instruction—which specifies one criterion (housing) for enlisted aide assignments and ties enlisted aide authorizations to the duties of GFO positions, including representational duties—does not include criteria to make clear how factors such as the number of qualifying representational events and size of military housing translate into enlisted aide workload for the purpose of identifying enlisted aide requirements and informing authorization and assignment decisions. Without additional guidance on how to determine enlisted aide workload in relation to factors such as housing and GFO official representational duties, military service and Joint Staff decisions regarding enlisted aide authorizations and assignments may not be consistent and transparent.

Certain Data DOD Used to Reach Conclusions in Its Enlisted Aides Report Were Not Reliable

DOD used data—including justifications for the authorization and assignment of enlisted aides—to reach its conclusions regarding enlisted aide reductions and a statutory cap on enlisted aide authorizations, but our review determined that certain data were inaccurate or incomplete and, therefore, not reliable. For example, justification data covered all 290 enlisted aides assigned to GFOs across the department, but we identified several areas where the data were not reliable.³⁶

- Some data were from different time periods—Enlisted aide authorization and assignment justifications for the Air Force and the Marine Corps reflected enlisted aide authorizations and assignments as of September 30, 2014, as required by section 504 of the fiscal year 2015 NDAA, according to Air Force and Marine Corps officials. However, officials from the Army, the Navy, and the Joint Staff stated that their justifications reflected enlisted aide authorizations and assignments as of February or March 2015. These officials also stated that the data they submitted for the report were compiled in response to a February 13, 2015, tasking memorandum from the USD P&R and that they used data current at that time because they did not maintain historical data regarding enlisted aide assignments and

³⁶ As discussed below, this count includes an enlisted aide assigned by the Navy to the Joint Staff on a temporary basis to help meet Joint Staff enlisted aide needs. Because both the Navy and the Joint Staff counted this aide, the overall number of assigned aides in the billet-by-billet justifications and elsewhere in DOD's report is listed at 290 instead of 289.

justifications.³⁷ OUSD P&R officials stated that a tasking memo they provided to the military services and the Joint Staff provided clear instructions that the data for the report should be as of September 30, 2014. Further, these officials stated that they had no reason to doubt the accuracy of the information provided by the military services or the Joint Staff.

- Some data conflicted—Certain data conflicted with related data elsewhere in DOD’s June 2015 report or with the source information we collected from the military services, suggesting that there were inaccuracies in the data. Examples we found include the following:
 - The Army provided justifications for the authorization or assignment of enlisted aides to 36 3-star generals, and the Marine Corps provided the same for 13 3-star generals. However, DOD’s report stated elsewhere that the Army had 30 3-star generals on active duty, and the Marine Corps had 12. OUSD P&R officials stated that the Army discrepancy could be attributed to the Army having authorized enlisted aides for four Joint Staff GFOs beyond what the Joint Staff had been authorized, and to two Army 3-star billets that were temporarily vacant but did not warrant the removal or reassignment of an enlisted aide. However, these officials could not identify all of the Joint Staff GFOs who had been authorized Army aides, and the enlisted aides assigned by the Army to these joint GFO billets were not included in the overall number of enlisted aides reported by DOD as being assigned to the Joint Staff. As a result, the actual number of enlisted aides assigned to the Joint Staff exceeded the number reported by DOD.
 - Several justifications did not align with the number of enlisted aides authorized or assigned to a GFO billet, or authorization and assignment justifications conflicted. For example, the billet justification section listed an enlisted aide assigned to a certain Army general, but the corresponding narrative stated that an enlisted aide was not authorized for that position because the general did not live in military housing or host qualifying

³⁷ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, *Comprehensive Report on Enlisted Aides* (Feb. 13, 2015).

representational events.³⁸ Similarly, the justification associated with a GFO assigned to the Joint Staff, who was not assigned an enlisted aide, stated that an aide was assigned to the GFO. Also, three separate assignment justifications for the Joint Staff stated that enlisted aides were authorized to assist the officer with myriad official duties and qualifying representational events, but the corresponding authorization justifications stated that the subject GFO hosted qualifying representational events on occasion and did not provide any detail regarding the officer's official duties.³⁹

- The number of 3-star GFOs assigned to the Joint Staff differed by one from the number of 3-star GFOs in corresponding source data we collected from the military services. This difference would have resulted in a different hypothetical maximum aide authorization for the Joint Staff.
- Both the Navy and the Joint Staff counted an enlisted aide assigned by the Navy to the Joint Staff on a temporary basis, resulting in a reported total of 290 assigned enlisted aides instead of 289. As a result, the actual total number of enlisted aides in either the Navy or the Joint Staff is lower than the number reported by one—depending on how this aide is counted—as is the total number of assigned aides across the department.
- Some data were incomplete—Narratives covering 78 assigned enlisted aides either did not discuss housing or mentioned housing indirectly by discussing duties associated with areas used for qualifying representational events.⁴⁰ OUSD P&R officials stated in relation to the incomplete justifications that each did not need to be exact. However, as previously mentioned, DOD's enlisted aide instruction generally requires that GFOs occupy military housing in order to be eligible for the assignment of an enlisted aide, and OUSD P&R instructed the military services and the Joint Staff to cite the size

³⁸ According to OUSD P&R officials, the Army general officer billet was vacant at this time but the enlisted aide was left in place because the Army anticipated staffing the billet within 120 days and it was more cost-effective than removing the aide and later assigning another.

³⁹ While the Joint Staff included both authorization and assignment justification narratives for these GFO positions, no enlisted aides were actually assigned.

⁴⁰ The absence of housing in these justification narratives does not indicate that the subject GFOs did not reside in military housing.

of military housing used for qualifying representational events to the extent possible when developing their justifications for the June 2015 report.

Federal internal control standards state that agencies should have relevant, reliable, and timely information for decision-making and external reporting purposes.⁴¹ Leading human capital practices similarly state that high-performing organizations use complete and reliable data to ensure that resources are properly matched to the needs of the environment.⁴² OUSD P&R officials stated that they took some steps to ensure the accuracy of military service and Joint Staff data by reviewing data for completeness and anomalies, and officials from each of the four military services and the Joint Staff informed us that they take actions to help ensure the accuracy of their data. These actions include access restrictions and quality checks, such as reviewing for anomalies. However, OUSD P&R officials stated that they did not have a process to assess the reliability of submitted data or the military services' and the Joint Staff's data collection and reporting methods and noted that they did not question the data because it had been approved by the service Secretaries. These same officials also noted that producing the enlisted aides report was a new process and that they will be better positioned to refine the process when producing future annual enlisted aide reports.

Our review found that some of the justification data presented in DOD's June 2015 report were inaccurate because the Army, the Navy, and the Joint Staff did not maintain historical data on enlisted aides and,

⁴¹ See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.: November 1999). These standards were in effect prior to fiscal year 2016 and cover the time period of DOD's data in its June 2015 report to Congress. The standards were subsequently updated and state that management should use quality information to make informed decisions by obtaining relevant data from reliable sources and evaluating internal and external sources for data reliability. Among other things, quality information is appropriate, current, complete, accurate, and timely. The updated standards went into effect on October 1, 2015. See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 10, 2014).

⁴² See GAO, *A Model of Strategic Human Capital Management*, [GAO-02-373SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 15, 2002). To develop this model, we reviewed sources, including lessons learned from public and private organizations that are viewed as leaders in strategic human capital management and managing for results, in addition to findings from academia, the Office of Personnel Management, the Merit Systems Protection Board, and the National Academy of Public Administration.

therefore, as noted above, could not produce data regarding their authorizations, assignments, and justifications as of September 30, 2014, as required by section 504 of the Fiscal Year 2015 NDAA. The collection of these data will likely be improved by DOD's updated Instruction 1315.09, which requires that the military services and the Joint Staff report to OUSD P&R on similar data. However, this requirement does not provide reasonable assurance that enlisted aide data will be fully accurate and complete. Without a process to assess the reliability of enlisted aide data submitted by the military services and the Joint Staff, DOD does not have reasonable assurance that the data it used to determine enlisted aide reductions were accurate, and Congress and senior DOD leaders may not have reliable data in future enlisted aide reports on which to base decisions on enlisted aides.

Conclusions

The military services' and Joint Staff's longstanding practice of assigning enlisted aides to GFOs has reduced the burden on GFOs of accomplishing minor but necessary tasks that otherwise might be done at the expense of the officers' primary military and official duties and responsibilities. However, in light of the fiscal year 2015 NDAA's reporting objective to reduce the total number of assigned enlisted aides across the department by 40, certain actions could better position DOD to assign aides more effectively and efficiently. For instance, the application of DOD's fair share methodology, while consistent with statute, does not account for enlisted aide personnel requirements or changing circumstances faced by the military services and Joint Staff in recent years. Without periodically assessing department-wide enlisted aide requirements DOD cannot determine the equitable allocation of enlisted aide authorizations across the department. Such an assessment—followed by a reallocation on the basis of its results—would better align the process for distributing enlisted aide allocations with the department's human capital management guidance and help ensure the effective and efficient use of the allowable total authorizations. In addition, decision makers need relevant information to guide them in determining requirements and allocations. Without providing guidance on criteria to determine enlisted aide workload, military service and Joint Staff decisions regarding enlisted aide authorizations and assignments may not be consistent and transparent, and those exercising oversight in DOD and Congress will lack reasonable assurance that these decisions are being made in relation to factors that drive enlisted aide workload.

Enhanced congressional understanding of authorizations, allocations, and billet-by-billet justifications also depends on providing reliable data in

DOD's annual enlisted aide reports. Without a process to assess the reliability of data submitted by the military services and Joint Staff for future reports, DOD cannot reasonably assure decision makers that its decisions will be based on quality information and that they will properly match resources to the needs of the environment. At a time of heightened resource concerns across the department and federal government, actions such as these would position DOD to allocate its enlisted aides in a manner that would better allow these personnel to provide GFOs with support where most needed.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense take the following four actions:

- (1) To help determine the equitable allocation of enlisted aide authorizations across the military services and the Joint Staff, direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, in coordination with the secretaries of the military departments and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to conduct an assessment of DOD-wide enlisted aide requirements and determine circumstances under which subsequent periodic updates should occur.
- (2) To help ensure the efficient and effective use of enlisted aides, direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to reallocate enlisted aide authorizations across the military services and the Joint Staff, under the statutory cap, based on its assessments of total enlisted aide requirements.
- (3) To help ensure consistency and transparency in military service and Joint Staff enlisted aide authorization and assignment decisions and to help determine enlisted aide requirements, direct the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, in coordination with the military services and Joint Staff, to establish criteria for determining enlisted aide workload and include these criteria in relevant enlisted aide guidance.
- (4) To help ensure the reliability of enlisted aide authorization, assignment, and justification data used in DOD's future annual enlisted aide reports and improve DOD's ability to make informed decisions about the enlisted aide program, direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to establish a process to assess the reliability of data submitted by the military services and the Joint Staff for future enlisted aide reports.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. In written comments, DOD concurred, with comment, on each of our four recommendations. DOD's comments are summarized below and reprinted in appendix II. DOD also provided technical comments on the draft report, which we incorporated as appropriate.

DOD concurred, with comment, on our first recommendation related to conducting an assessment of DOD-wide enlisted aide requirements, stating that it would appear to call for duplication of the annual, department-wide billet-by-billet review of enlisted aide authorization and assignment required by 10 U.S.C. § 981(c). DOD further noted that going forward, the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff will identify their respective total enlisted aide requirements, including requirements that, if authorized, would cause the department to exceed the ceiling on the number of enlisted aides authorized by law. DOD's annual enlisted aide report, required by 10 U.S.C. § 981, is to specify the number of enlisted aides authorized and allocated—as of September 30 of the previous year—to GFOs of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, and the Joint Staff, and to justify on a billet-by-billet basis the authorization and assignment of each enlisted aide to each GFO position. DOD did not include the billet-by-billet justifications in the first installment of its annual report, stating that additional time was needed to prepare the justifications and that the information would be included in the June 2015 report. As noted in our report, DOD's June 2015 enlisted aides report partially addressed the requirement to include billet-by-billet justifications for enlisted aide authorizations and assignments as of September 30, 2014, but these justifications were based on the department's existing allocation and did not constitute an assessment of total DOD-wide enlisted aide requirements. DOD officials told us during our review that such an assessment would likely demonstrate a need for additional enlisted aides. As a result, we do not believe that the assessment of total enlisted aide requirements duplicates the process mandated by 10 U.S.C. § 981. However, by identifying and including requirements in future annual reviews that, if authorized, would cause the department to exceed the ceiling on the number of enlisted aides authorized by law, DOD should meet the intent of our recommendation and therefore better position itself to equitably distribute these resources across the military services and the Joint Staff and ensure their efficient and effective use.

DOD concurred, with comment, on the second recommendation to reallocate enlisted aides across the military services and the Joint Staff based on its assessments of total enlisted aide requirements, noting that

the department “froze” the past two allocation reviews to allow a period of stabilization following the implementation of a new guiding document on enlisted aides, coordination on the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff “13 Professional Character Initiatives,” and feedback and dialogue with Congress on the reports submitted in March and June of 2015. As noted in our report, DOD has not reallocated its enlisted aide authorizations since 2010, and DOD’s enlisted aide Instruction and reports were issued in 2015. We are encouraged, however, that DOD also stated in its comments that it will endeavor to improve the allocation process to better support actual service and joint requirements. By reallocating enlisted aide authorizations, under the statutory cap, based on its assessments of total enlisted aide requirements, DOD should meet the intent of our recommendation and more reasonably ensure that these resources are properly matched to the needs of today’s environment.

DOD concurred, with comment, on our third recommendation, that it establish criteria for determining enlisted aide workload and include these criteria in relevant enlisted aide guidance. Specifically, DOD stated that the workload of an enlisted aide is unique to each position and area of responsibility, and that establishing a fixed set of workload criteria would significantly limit the flexibility of the department and “tremendously increase” the management investment associated with a discrete program comprising 300 or fewer personnel. As noted in our report, DOD’s enlisted aides Instruction specifies military housing as the lone eligibility criterion for enlisted aide assignments and ties enlisted aide authorizations to the official duties of GFO positions, including representational duties. Additionally, OUSD P&R instructed the military services and the Joint Staff to cite, to the extent possible, the number of qualifying representational events and the size of military housing used for hosting qualifying representational events when developing their justifications for the June 2015 report. However, DOD’s Instruction does not include criteria to make clear how factors such as the number of qualifying representational events and size of military housing translate into enlisted aide workload for the purpose of identifying enlisted aide requirements and informing authorization and assignment decisions. As a result, justifications for enlisted aide authorizations vary and are subjective, and it is unclear how duties and workload support enlisted aide assignments. Accordingly, we continue to believe that, without additional guidance on how to determine enlisted aide workload in relation to factors such as housing and GFO official representational duties, military service and Joint Staff decisions regarding enlisted aide authorizations and assignments may not be consistent and transparent, and those exercising oversight in DOD and Congress will lack reasonable

assurance that these decisions are being made in relation to factors that drive enlisted aide workload. Further, with enlisted aide duties already tied principally to housing and official representational duties, we do not believe that establishing workload criteria would significantly limit the flexibility of the department or significantly increase its management investment in enlisted aides.

DOD concurred, with comment, on our fourth recommendation, that it establish a process to assess the reliability of data submitted by the military services and the Joint Staff for future enlisted aide reports. Specifically, DOD stated that they expect that each submission is already subject to intense scrutiny and high-level review prior to its aggregation and delivery to the Office of the Secretary of Defense and that the review process within the Office will continue to analyze those reports closely, in the interests of consistency and transparency, and to resolve potential anomalies prior to submission to Congress. However, as noted in this report, our review determined that, while DOD took some steps to ensure the accuracy of military service and Joint Staff data, it did not have a process to assess the reliability of submitted data, and that certain data were inaccurate or incomplete, and therefore, not reliable. We continue to maintain that, without establishing a process to assess the reliability of enlisted aide data submitted by the military services and the Joint Staff, DOD does not have reasonable assurance that the data it used to determine enlisted aide reductions were accurate, and Congress and senior DOD leaders may not have reliable data in future enlisted aide reports on which to base decisions on enlisted aides.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Secretaries of the Military Departments, and the Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps. The report also is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda S. Farrell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B' and a distinct 'S'.

Brenda S. Farrell
Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Enlisted Aide Duties

Table 4 shows enlisted aide duties that DOD has authorized and duties that it has deemed unauthorized in DOD Instruction 1315.09, along with some additional duties specified by the military services in DOD's June 2015 enlisted aides report.¹ DOD Instruction 1315.09 states that its lists of authorized and unauthorized duties provide examples of such activities and therefore are not exhaustive.

Table 4: Examples of Authorized and Unauthorized Enlisted Aide Duties

Authorized duties in DOD guidance	Unauthorized duties in DOD guidance	Additional duties authorized by the military services in DOD's June 2015 report
<p>Maintaining the care, cleanliness, and order of those areas of assigned military housing used for qualifying representational events,^a to include common areas that provide access to these spaces (such as stairways and hallways) or areas of the assigned housing that are used by enlisted aides in support of these events.</p> <p>Maintaining the care of military uniforms, civilian attire worn for official representational events, and government-issued equipment of the assigned general and flag officer (GFO).</p> <p>Receiving guests and visitors during qualifying representational events at the GFO's assigned military housing and acting as a point of contact in the GFO's assigned military housing on issues related to any official duties or responsibilities.</p> <p>Planning, preparation, arrangement, and conduct of qualifying representational events, such as receptions, parties, and dinners.</p> <p>Purchasing, preparing, and serving food and beverages in the GFO's assigned military housing for a qualifying representational event.</p> <p>Purchasing and preparing meals for the GFO, and those immediate family members eating with the GFO, during the enlisted aide's normal duty work schedule.</p>	<p>Any form of pet care, including grooming, feeding, exercising, feces removal, and veterinary visits.</p> <p>Any form of caregiving for family members or personal guests of the GFO.</p> <p>Operation, care, maintenance, licensing, inspection, or cleaning of any privately-owned vehicle.</p> <p>Maintenance of privately-owned recreational or sporting equipment, except with the use of such equipment for official purposes.</p> <p>Personal services performed solely for the benefit of family members or unofficial guests, including driving, shopping, running private errands, or laundry services.</p> <p>Landscaping or grounds keeping (such as trimming trees or bushes, laying mulch, and planting flowers) in areas not commonly used for qualifying representational events.</p> <p>Skilled trade services such as electrical, plumbing, personal computer or furnishing repairs, other than routine upkeep and maintenance.</p> <p>Care or cleaning duties in military housing that contribute solely to the personal benefit of the GFO or dependents; such as making beds, cleaning private areas, or organizing</p>	<p>Maintaining accountability of all government property in assigned military housing (Army).</p> <p>Maintaining accountability of, and ensuring care of, all government-owned furnishings, antiques, and memorabilia (Marine Corps).</p> <p>Managing hand receipts/inventories, storage, and serviceability of government-owned furnishings as appropriate (Navy).</p> <p>Maintaining and scheduling all work order requirements for assigned military housing before, after, and during the flag officer's assignment/permanent change of station (Navy).</p> <p>Developing standard operating procedures/continuity book for assigned military housing that includes work schedules; cleaning schedules (daily, weekly, monthly, semi-annual, and annual); local points of contact; general officer uniform requirements; and the general officer's personal requirements, preferences, and recommendations (Army).</p> <p>Maintaining sanitation standards in accordance with the Tri-Service Food Code (Navy).</p> <p>Supervising maintenance personnel at the residence, to include landscaping and pesticide schedules, and ensuring all codes are being met (Marine Corps).</p> <p>Developing and executing a schedule for daily, weekly, and monthly cleaning and generating a work schedule to ensure all requirements are satisfied (Marine Corps).</p> <p>Maintaining official representation funds and</p>

¹ DOD Instruction 1315.09, *Utilization of Enlisted Aides on Personal Staffs of General and Flag Officers (G/FOs)* (Mar.6, 2015).

Appendix I: Enlisted Aide Duties

Authorized duties in DOD guidance	Unauthorized duties in DOD guidance	Additional duties authorized by the military services in DOD's June 2015 report
<p>Normal duty work schedules may not be extended solely to accommodate preparing three meals each day.</p> <p>Assisting with permanent change of station moves, which may include packing/unpacking of official books, military uniforms, and government-issued equipment. The assistance does not include packing/unpacking the GFO's personal items.</p> <p>Performing general yard maintenance, to include lawn care, removing debris and litter, unless there is an existing lawn care contract. If there is an existing lawn care contract, minor general yard maintenance in preparation of qualifying representational events is authorized.</p> <p>Accomplishing tasks that aid the GFO in the performance of his or her military and other official duties and responsibilities, including performing errands for the GFO, that have a substantive connection to the GFO's official responsibilities and/or assist with the physical security of the GFO's military housing.^b</p>	<p>personal effects. This includes care and cleaning of any area after it has been used for a personal or unofficial event or spaces used exclusively by dependents.</p>	<p>personal funds accounting records (Army).</p>

Source: GAO analysis of DOD Instruction 1315.09, *Utilization of Enlisted Aides (EAs) on Personal Staffs of General and Flag Officers (G/FOs)* (Mar. 6, 2015), and Report to the Committees on Armed Services on Enlisted Aides for General and Flag Officers Required by Section 504 of the Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 (June 30, 2015). | GAO-16-239

^aQualifying representational events are events hosted by GFOs that primarily serve to further the mission of the agency. Such events must be substantively related to the official performance of GFOs' military and other official duties and responsibilities, including representational duties associated with GFOs' assigned position.

^bErrands should not be of a personal nature for the GFO or his or her dependents. Local transportation costs for duties performed at the expense of the enlisted aide will be reimbursed consistent with chapter 11 of Volume 10 of the DOD Financial Management Regulation 7000.14-R or Part L of chapter 2 of Joint Travel Regulations . Physical security includes, but is not limited to, securing the GFO's military housing, adhering to basic antiterrorism and force protection measures as the environment dictates, and maintaining situational awareness.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS

FEB - 1 2016

U.S. Government Accountability Office
Attention: Ms. Brenda Farrell
441 G Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farrell:

This letter provides the Department's response to the recommendations in the U.S. Government Accountability report, "Military Enlisted Aides: DOD's Report Met Most Statutory Requirements, but Aide Allocation Could Be Improved (GAO-16-239)." The Department concurs with comment on the following four recommendations.

The first recommendation, to conduct an assessment of DOD-wide enlisted aide requirements and determine the circumstances under which subsequent periodic updates to those requirements should occur, would appear to call for duplication of an existing process. The statute governing the allocation of enlisted aides, title 10, U.S. Code, section 981(c), mandates an annual, Department-wide billet-by-billet review of each enlisted aide authorization and assignment. Going forward, the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff will identify their respective total enlisted aide requirements, including requirements that, if authorized, would cause the Department to exceed the ceiling on the number of enlisted aides authorized by law, in the context of this annual review. Per your recommendation, the Department will continue to work with the Military Departments and Joint Staff to refine the process of assessing enlisted aide requirements to promote consistency and transparency, while working within the constraints established by any statutory cap on the total number of enlisted aides and the Department's policy of granting priority to Joint Staff needs.

The Department concurs with the second recommendation that the Department reallocate enlisted aides based on the Department's assessment of the program and requirements across the Services and Joint Staff. The Department "froze" the past two allocation reviews to allow a period of stabilization following the implementation of a new guiding document on enlisted aides, coordination on the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff "13 Professional Character Initiatives," and feedback from and dialogue with Congress on the reports submitted in March and June of 2015. Within the statutory ceiling under which the Department currently operates, we will endeavor to improve the allocation process to better support actual Service and Joint requirements.

The Department concurs with comment on the third and fourth recommendations to establish criteria for determining enlisted aide workload and to establish a process to assess the reliability of data submitted by the Services and the Joint Staff. The workload of an enlisted aide is and, we believe, will remain unique to each position and each area of responsibility. Establishing a fixed set of workload criteria would significantly limit the flexibility of the Department and tremendously increase the management investment associated with a discrete program comprising 300 or less personnel. Additionally, enlisted aid data is provided by each Military Department's Manpower and Reserve Affairs representative on behalf of the Military Department Service Secretary concerned, and by the Director of the Joint Staff, on behalf of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. While we expect that each submission already is subject to intense scrutiny and high level reviews prior to its aggregation and delivery to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the review process within OSD will continue to analyze those reports closely, in the interests of consistency and transparency, and to resolve potential anomalies prior to submission to Congress. The Department will further take into consideration your recommendations that we develop and implement additional guidance applicable to future reviews. Additionally, we will address these recommendations with the Joint Staff's General and Flag Officer Matters Office, and each Military Departments' General and Flag Officer Matters Office as part of our ongoing engagement on this issue.

The Department believes that the current process meets Congressional intent and affords the Military Departments and the Joint Staff both the appropriate level of guidance and the requisite flexibility to manage a relatively small number of personnel comparative to the overall force. This flexibility, when applied within the bounds of our overarching policy guidance, allows the Department to make necessary adjustments without creating a workforce or career field shortage and to monitor enlisted aide requirements and allocations while managing the expectation of reductions to this program. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that improvements—such as those you suggest—would further our interest in program consistency and transparency. To that end, we believe that each subsequent annual report will capitalize on improvements to the program, while supporting sustainable and viable enlisted aide opportunities and utilization.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the recommendations in your report. Your in-depth analysis will prove most helpful to the management of this program going forward.

Sincerely,



A. M. Kurta
Deputy Assistant Secretary
(Military Personnel Policy)

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Brenda S. Farrell, (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Bev Schladt, Assistant Director; Ryan D'Amore; Alexandra Gebhard; Amie Lesser; Richard Powelson; Michael Silver; Patrick Tierney; Erik Wilkins-McKee; and Michael Willems made key contributions to this report.

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