

# 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](mailto:farrellb@gao.gov)

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## MILITARY ENLISTED AIDES

### 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.