



Highlights of [GAO-03-699](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Professional Boxing Safety Act of 1996 established minimum health and safety standards for professional boxing and provided for limited federal oversight by the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission. In 2000, the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act amended the act to better protect boxers' economic well-being and enhance the integrity of the sport. However, reports of problems continue, including permanent and sometimes fatal injuries, economic exploitation, and corruption.

GAO was asked to (1) identify fundamental elements considered important to protect professional boxers and enhance the integrity of the sport; (2) assess the extent to which provisions of the Professional Boxing Safety Act of 1996, as amended (the act), cover these elements and determine whether selected state and tribal boxing commissions have documentation indicating compliance with the act's provisions; (3) determine whether selected states and tribes have provisions that cover additional elements; and (4) identify federal actions taken under the act.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-699](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-699).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Bernard Ungar, (202) 512-4232, [ungarb@gao.gov](mailto:ungarb@gao.gov).

## PROFESSIONAL BOXING

# Issues Related to the Protection of Boxers' Health, Safety, and Economic Interests

## What GAO Found

Based on GAO's review of congressional testimonies and national studies dating from 1994 through 2002, GAO identified 15 fundamental elements that are considered important to protect boxers' health, safety, and economic well-being and to enhance the integrity of the sport.

The act addresses 10 of the 15 fundamental elements that GAO identified. The 8 (of 46) state and 2 (of 8) tribal boxing commissions that GAO selected for review accounted for 49 percent of the fights in 2001 and varied in the extent to which they had documentation indicating compliance with the 10 provisions of the act related to the fundamental elements. For example, all 10 commissions had documentation indicating compliance at least 75 percent of the time for 3 provisions—requiring prefight medical exams, disclosure of purses and payments, and registration of boxers—but only 2 commissions had documentation indicating compliance at least 75 percent of the time for a provision prohibiting conflicts of interest. Commissions either gave no reason for the lack of documentation, cited privacy or liability concerns, or said they were unaware of the federal provision.

The eight states and two tribes that GAO reviewed vary in the extent to which they adopted additional provisions that cover elements not covered by the act's provisions. The number of such provisions ranges from 10 (California) to 4 (Missouri). For example, the states have provisions requiring the filing of postfight medical reports, uniform boxing and scoring rules, and boxing commission officials' knowledge of the sport.

Federal actions taken under the act have been limited. The Department of Justice said it has not exercised its authority to prosecute cases because none have been referred to it by federal law enforcement authorities. Furthermore it noted that violations under the act are misdemeanors, and it generally applies its resources to prosecuting felonies. The Federal Trade Commission periodically checks the Web sites of the organizations that sanction professional boxing events to see whether they have posted the information that they are required to make available to the public and has found them to be adequate. Legislation was recently introduced to significantly amend the act by, among other things, creating a new organization within the Department of Labor that would provide oversight and enforcement of boxing laws. This new federal organization is intended to facilitate more uniform enforcement of federal requirements aimed at enhancing boxers' health, safety, and general interests as well as the integrity of the sport.

The Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission provided only technical comments on our report. The Association of Boxing Commissions and five state and tribal commissions had concerns about the lack of existing federal enforcement and the economic impact of any additional federal requirements.