

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-123](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

As of November 2020, BOP employed more than 37,000 individuals responsible for the care and custody of more than 125,000 federal inmates in BOP institutions. Questions have been raised about BOP's ability to fully staff its institutions, the effects of staffing shortfalls, and the mental health of corrections staff.

GAO was asked to examine BOP staffing levels and other related challenges. This report examines, among other objectives: (1) the methods BOP uses to assess staffing levels; (2) the practices BOP uses to address any staffing challenges, and the extent to which it assesses their effectiveness; and (3) what, if anything, BOP could do to improve staff mental health and related services. Among other methods, GAO examined program and staffing documentation and data, and interviewed BOP officials knowledgeable about budget and personnel practices.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 7 recommendations, including that BOP develop and implement a reliable method for calculating staffing levels, or amend existing methods; conduct a risk assessment of its overtime use; and develop and implement a method to routinely collect and evaluate employee feedback on its Employee Assistance Program. The Department of Justice concurred with our recommendations.

View [GAO-21-123](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or GoodwinG@gao.gov.

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BUREAU OF PRISONS

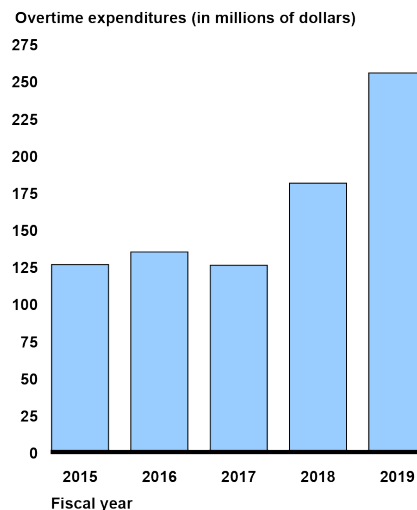
Opportunities Exist to Better Analyze Staffing Data and Improve Employee Wellness Programs

What GAO Found

The Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has multiple methods for assessing its staffing levels to determine shortfalls, but each contains inconsistencies in either terminology or methodology and we found reliability concerns with each. For two methods, BOP was unable to provide supporting documentation, and for the third, a BOP official stated that the method did not account for different institutions' characteristics. By developing a reliable method for calculating staffing levels at BOP institutions, or amending existing methods, BOP would have a more accurate picture of the extent of any shortfalls and could take corrective action to address identified workforce gaps.

BOP has practices for addressing staffing challenges, such as using overtime, but has not assessed associated risks to staff and inmate safety, such as officer fatigue and decreased observation skills. Overtime expenditures, without adjusting for inflation, have increased 102 percent from 2015 through 2019. Conducting a risk assessment of its overtime use would better position BOP to identify the potential risks of overtime and respond, as appropriate.

Overtime Expenditures at Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Institutions from Fiscal Years 2015 through 2019



Source: GAO analysis of BOP Data. | GAO-21-123

Note: Data are expenditures in nominal dollars, and have not been adjusted for inflation. For more details, see figure 4 in GAO-21-123

BOP could improve data collection efforts to enhance its employee wellness programs. For example, BOP operates an Employee Assistance Program, which provides counseling and referral services to employees, and BOP is working to improve the program. However, BOP has not collected program feedback from employees in a systematic way. By developing a method to routinely collect and evaluate feedback, BOP would be better positioned to help ensure employee satisfaction and to identify ways to continually enhance the program.