

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104533](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Air Force and Navy spend billions of dollars annually to maintain their aircraft. The ability of the Air Force and Navy to complete aircraft maintenance directly affects military readiness, as maintenance delays reduce the time during which aircraft are available for operations and training.

House Report 116-442 included a provision for GAO to examine unit-level aviation maintenance. Among other things, this report assesses (1) trends in mission capability rates and related maintenance metrics for selected aircraft since fiscal year 2015 (2) the extent to which the Air Force and Navy have mitigated sustainment risks.

GAO selected a non-generalizable sample of eight out of 31 Air Force and Navy fixed-wing aircraft and analyzed maintenance and staffing metrics from fiscal years 2015 through 2021; reviewed sustainment reviews and related DOD guidance; and interviewed DOD, military service, and unit officials.

## What GAO Recommends

Congress should consider requiring the Air Force and Navy to provide Congress plans to address risks to aircraft availability found in sustainment reviews. GAO is making four recommendations to the Air Force and Navy to prioritize and complete required sustainment reviews in a timelier manner and develop plans to remedy risks to aircraft availability. DOD generally concurred with the recommendations. The Navy did not agree to complete sustainment reviews in a timelier manner, citing resource limitations. GAO believes the Navy should complete these reviews with a greater sense of urgency.

View [GAO-22-104533](#). For more information, contact Diana Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or [MaurerD@gao.gov](mailto:MaurerD@gao.gov).

June 2022

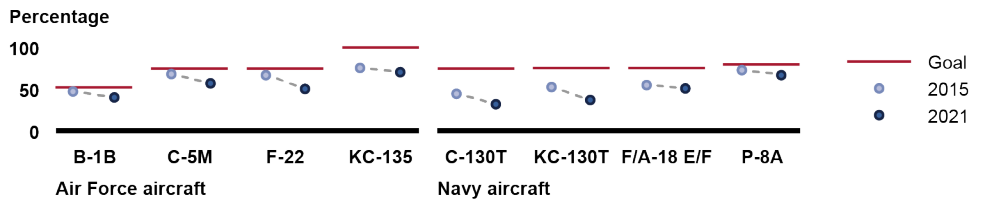
# AIR FORCE AND NAVY AVIATION

## Actions Needed to Address Persistent Sustainment Risks

### What GAO Found

Mission capable rates—a metric used to assess the health and readiness of an aircraft fleet—and other related maintenance metrics trends have worsened since fiscal year 2015 for eight selected aircraft (see figure).

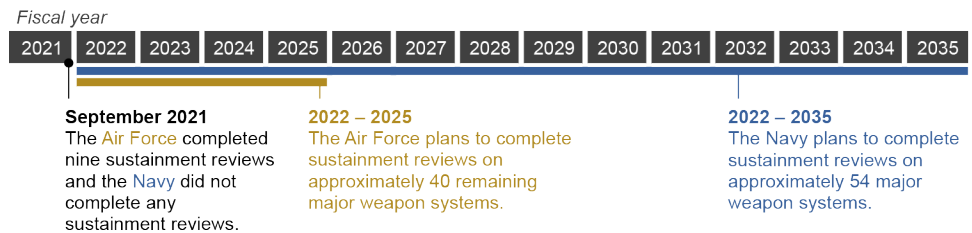
**Average Mission Capable Rates, by Percentage, for Selected Air Force and Navy Aircraft, Fiscal Years 2015 and 2021**



Source: GAO analysis of Air Force and Navy data. | GAO-22-104533

While the Air Force and Navy have initiatives to address unit-level maintenance challenges, neither service has mitigated persistent fixed-wing aircraft sustainment risks. A statute enacted in 2016 requires the services to conduct sustainment reviews for major weapon systems to assess their product support strategy and performance, among other things. GAO found, however, that the Air Force and Navy have not completed these sustainment reviews for all aircraft (see figure). Both the Air Force and Navy have plans to complete the required sustainment reviews by the end of fiscal years 2025 and 2035, respectively.

**Estimated Timeline for Air Force and Navy to Complete Required Sustainment Reviews, as of October 2021**



Source: GAO analysis of statutory reporting requirements and Air Force and Navy data. | GAO-22-104533

Without the Air Force and Navy prioritizing the completion of required sustainment reviews and updating their schedules to complete the reviews in a timelier manner, the services are missing opportunities to identify maintenance and other risks to aircraft availability. Further, neither the Air Force nor the Navy have completed mitigation plans to remedy maintenance challenges, risks, or related impacts identified in any sustainment reviews. As a result, the Air Force and Navy cannot fully address unit-level aviation maintenance challenges affecting aircraft availability required for training and operations. If Congress required the Air Force and Navy to submit mitigation plans to Congress related to maintenance challenges and risks to aircraft availability found in sustainment reviews, it would enhance the services' accountability for taking the necessary and appropriate actions to address persistent challenges to aircraft availability.