

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105231](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

As a part of their oversight function, congressional committees and members of Congress hold hearings and send hundreds of information requests to DOJ and its components each year.

The Office of Legislative Affairs has primary responsibility for communications between Congress and DOJ. Five DOJ law enforcement components, including the FBI, also develop responses to Congress. However, Members of Congress have raised questions about DOJ's responsiveness to their requests.

GAO was asked to review DOJ and FBI procedures for responding to congressional requests for information. This report examines the extent to which DOJ has processes and information to effectively track and monitor responses to congressional correspondence and the timeliness of its responses.

GAO analyzed policies and processes of DOJ and five of its components; assessed available congressional correspondence data from calendar years 2012 to 2021; and interviewed DOJ officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOJ (1) maintain readily available, accurate and complete data on congressional correspondence, (2) develop guidance on tracking system data quality, and (3) develop timeliness performance measures. DOJ generally concurred with our recommendations and said it has already begun to implement them.

View [GAO-23-105231](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or GoodwinG@gao.gov or Triana McNeil at (202) 512-8777 or McNeilT@gao.gov.

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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Actions Needed to Better Track and Monitor Responses to Congressional Correspondence

What GAO Found

The Department of Justice (DOJ) lacks some key information that is preventing it from effectively tracking and monitoring responses to congressional correspondence. Specifically, DOJ does not systematically maintain quality data to track and monitor the status of responses, lacks guidance to ensure tracking system data quality, and has limited efforts to measure timeliness performance.

- **Quality data to track and monitor responses.** DOJ does not systematically maintain readily available, accurate, and complete data on the universe of responses to congressional requests in DOJ's department-wide correspondence management system. For example, GAO analysis of available DOJ congressional correspondence data found that there are records with hundreds or over a thousand days between the date on the letter and the date DOJ documented receipt of the letter. However, certain components have taken steps to help ensure data quality. For example, the FBI has developed a data system tool that displays infographics of aggregate data with the status of pending letters to Congress that it uses to track and monitor response times and assess which stages of the process are potentially contributing to delays.
- **Guidance on data quality.** DOJ has not established guidance on data quality to ensure the department and its components maintain reliable data on congressional correspondence from receipt to disposition. For example, DOJ's *Correspondence Manual* does not address how to maintain the data in its department-wide tracking system. However, the manual establishes policies and procedures for managing correspondence. GAO found that certain components also have inaccurate or incomplete congressional correspondence data. For example, GAO analysis of Federal Bureau of Prisons data found variation in the accuracy and completeness of date fields related to the receipt and disposition of congressional correspondence.
- **Timeliness performance measures.** DOJ's Office of Legislative Affairs and three of the five components GAO reviewed have not yet developed performance measures to monitor the timeliness of their responses to Congress, but two have such measures. For example, the FBI has a performance goal of responding to certain oversight correspondence within 90 days. Federal internal control standards call for agencies, as part of program management, to develop and monitor performance measures to compare actual performance to expected results.

Ensuring its congressional correspondence tracking data are readily available, accurate, and complete, and developing guidance on data quality would help ensure that DOJ has the ability to systematically track and monitor efforts to develop timely responses and make any needed process improvements. Further, developing timeliness performance measures would better position DOJ to systematically identify the components or types of responses that are taking longer than expected and help DOJ and its components better manage the timeliness of responses to Congress.