

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-275T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

BOP's rising costs and offender recidivism present incarceration challenges to both DOJ and the nation. For example, BOP's operating costs have generally increased over time, and in fiscal year 2017 amounted to more than \$6.9 billion, or 24 percent of DOJ's total discretionary budget. In addition, from 1980 through 2013, BOP's prison population increased by almost 800 percent, from 24,640 to 219,298. While the prison population began to decline in 2013, DOJ has continued to identify prison crowding as a critical issue. GAO has examined a number of DOJ efforts to slow the growth of the prison population and to reduce recidivism through the use of reentry programs to help offenders successfully return to the community.

This statement summarizes findings and recommendations from recent GAO reports that address (1) DOJ's incarceration reduction initiatives, and (2) BOP reentry programs.

This statement is based on prior GAO products issued from February 2012 through June 2016, along with updates on the status of recommendations obtained as of December 2017. For the updates on DOJ's progress in implementing recommendations, GAO analyzed information provided by DOJ officials on actions taken and planned.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made 10 recommendations to DOJ in prior reports to help improve performance measurement and resource management. DOJ generally concurred and has addressed or taken steps to address several. GAO continues to believe all of these recommendations should be fully implemented.

View [GAO-18-275T](#). For more information, contact Diana Maurer at (202) 512-8777 or maurerd@gao.gov.

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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Continued Action Needed To Address Incarceration Challenges and Offenders' Reentry

What GAO Found

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has fully addressed two of six GAO recommendations related to its incarceration reduction initiatives. In June 2015 and June 2016, GAO reported that to help address challenges associated with incarceration, DOJ had, among other things, taken steps to reduce the prison population by pursuing initiatives to use alternatives to incarceration for low-level nonviolent crimes. GAO made six recommendations to DOJ related to these efforts. As of December 2017, DOJ has implemented two of the six recommendations and has not fully addressed the remaining four. Specifically, to enhance efforts to measure program outcomes, DOJ issued guidance on proper data entry and began tracking data on different types of pretrial diversion programs that allow certain offenders to avoid incarceration if they satisfy program requirements. In addition, as of December 2017, DOJ has taken steps to partially implement GAO's recommendation to address unnecessary delays in reviewing inmates' petitions to commute their sentences.

DOJ has not taken action to address recommendations to better assess the results of pretrial diversion programs or another effort to prioritize prosecutions and reform sentencing to eliminate unfair disparities, among other goals. Further, in December 2017, DOJ noted there had been policy changes since GAO made a recommendation related to enhancing measures to monitor prioritizing prosecution and sentencing reform. Although DOJ reported taking some actions to implement GAO's recommendation, these actions did not include establishing measures that incorporate key elements of successful performance measurement systems.

DOJ has addressed two of four GAO recommendations related to its reentry programs. As part of its mission to protect public safety, DOJ's Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) provides reentry programming that aims to facilitate offenders' successful return to the community and reduce recidivism (a return to prison or criminal behavior). These reentry efforts include programs offered in BOP facilities as well as contractor-managed residential reentry centers (RRC)—also known as halfway houses—and home confinement services that allow inmates to serve the final months of their sentences in the community. GAO issued three reports in February 2012, June 2015, and June 2016 and made four recommendations to BOP in this area.

As of December 2017, DOJ has implemented two of the four recommendations and has begun to take action to address one of the remaining two. Specifically, to implement one of GAO's recommendations, DOJ established a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of all the 18 reentry programs it offers to inmates in BOP facilities. To implement another GAO recommendation to improve cost management, DOJ began requiring contractors to submit separate prices for RRC beds and home confinement services. As of December 2017, DOJ noted it has taken initial steps to address a recommendation to track outcome data for its RRC and home confinement programs; however, it has not taken action to develop measures to assess the performance of these programs.