

## Why GAO Did This Study

Since 1987, body armor—in the form of ballistic-resistant and stab-resistant vests—has reportedly saved the lives of over 3,000 law enforcement officers nationwide. Recognizing body armor's value, the Department of Justice (DOJ)—through its Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and its National Institute of Justice (NIJ)—has implemented initiatives to support state and local law enforcement agencies' use of body armor. GAO was asked to examine (1) DOJ's efforts to support the use of body armor, (2) the extent to which DOJ has designed controls to manage and coordinate these efforts, and (3) the factors affecting body armor's use and effectiveness and steps DOJ has taken to address them. GAO reviewed information on DOJ's efforts, and interviewed officials from BJA, NIJ, 6 manufacturers, 2 laboratories, 3 law enforcement associations, 10 state and local jurisdictions, and 12 stakeholders in and outside of government. GAO selected these organizations nonrandomly based in part on their size, and location. GAO also examined body armor literature on key factors affecting body armor's use and effectiveness and reviewed DOJ's efforts to address these factors.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that among other actions, DOJ deobligate undisbursed funds from grants in the BVP program that have closed, establish consistent requirements within its body armor grant programs, and track grantees' intended stab-resistant vest purchases. DOJ generally agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-12-353](#). For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or [maurerd@gao.gov](mailto:maurerd@gao.gov).

## LAW ENFORCEMENT BODY ARMOR

### DOJ Could Enhance Grant Management Controls and Better Ensure Consistency in Grant Program Requirements

## What GAO Found

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has a number of initiatives to support body armor use by state and local law enforcement, including funding, research, standards development, and testing programs. Two Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) grant programs provide funding to state and local law enforcement to facilitate their body armor purchases. The Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) program offers 2-year grants on a reimbursable basis. The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program provides 4-year grant money up front that can be used to fund body armor procurement along with other criminal justice activities. Since the BVP program's inception in 1999, it has reimbursed grantees about \$247 million for their purchases of nearly 1 million vests. The JAG program has provided nearly \$4 billion from fiscal years 2006 through 2011, but BJA does not know how much of this amount grantees have spent on body armor because it is not required to track expenditures for specific purposes. BJA reports that from fiscal years 2006 through 2011, 357 grantees intended to use JAG funds for ballistic-resistant vest procurement, but it does not track how many grantees intended to purchase stab-resistant vests. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) sponsors body armor research, establishes body armor performance standards, and oversees body armor testing for compliance.

DOJ designed several internal controls to manage and coordinate BJA's and NIJ's body armor activities, but could take steps to strengthen them, consistent with standards for internal control. For example, the BVP program has not deobligated about \$27 million in undisbursed funds from grant awards whose terms have ended. To strengthen fund management, DOJ could deobligate these funds for grants that have closed and, for example, apply the amounts to new awards or reduce requests for future budgets. Also, unlike the BVP program, the JAG program does not require that the body armor purchased be NIJ compliant or that officers be mandated to wear the armor purchased. To promote officer safety and harmonize the BVP and JAG programs, DOJ could establish consistent body armor requirements.

Factors affecting body armor use and effectiveness include law enforcement agencies' policies mandating wear; the comfort, fit, and coverage of the vests; degradation caused by wear and tear; and exposure to environmental conditions. Among other efforts to address these factors, DOJ has revised its standards and compliance tests to incorporate the latest technology.

### Examples of Body Armor



Source: NIJ.