WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

DOD Has Improved Oversight for Reprisal Investigations, but Can Take Additional Actions to Standardize Process and Reporting

What GAO Recommended

DODIG has strengthened its oversight of military service reprisal investigations in response to recommendations made in 2012 and 2015 by establishing processes and developing guidance for overseeing investigations, among other things. For example, in 2015, GAO found that DODIG did not have a process for documenting whether investigations were independent and were conducted by someone outside the military service chain of command. In response, DODIG directed the service IGs to certify investigators' independence for oversight reviews. GAO also found in 2015 that DODIG had provided limited guidance to investigators using its case management system, limiting its utility as a real-time management system, as intended. In response, DODIG issued a system guide and a data entry guide, which provide key information on how to work with and maintain system data. However, in 2015 GAO also found that DODIG and the military service IGs used different terms in their guidance to investigators, hindering DODIG oversight of case completeness. GAO recommended that DOD direct the military service IGs to follow standardized investigation stages and issue related guidance. DODIG officials stated in August 2016 that they are working with the services to standardize investigation stages and that DODIG is willing to work with the Secretary of Defense to issue such direction. Separately, GAO found in 2012 that unreliable data on corrective actions taken in response to substantiated reprisal cases was hampering oversight and recommended that DOD regularly report to Congress on the frequency and type of corrective actions taken in response to substantiated reprisal claims. DODIG reports some corrective actions in its semiannual report to Congress, but does not include all relevant corrective actions or outstanding corrective action recommendations.