

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-215](#), a report to congressional requesters.

Why GAO Did This Study

The variety of civil and criminal cases tried in 400-plus federal courthouses can pose security risks. The CSP was started in 2012 and was designed to be a less costly alternative to building new federal courthouses by adding key security features to existing courthouses. Congress has provided \$20 million in obligatory authority for the program in each of the fiscal years that it has been funded.

GAO was asked to review physical security at federal courthouses. This report discusses (1) the extent to which federal stakeholders have identified security concerns; (2) how the CSP addresses courthouse security concerns; and (3) what actions federal agencies could take, if any, to improve courthouse security. GAO reviewed agency documents, AOUSC security scores, and interviewed officials from the Marshals Service, FPS, GSA, and AOUSC. GAO also visited eight courthouses to include six locations selected for CSP projects, and two that were considered but not selected. Although these site visits cannot be generalized to all CSP project locations or all federal courthouses, they provide insight into federal agencies' practices to secure courthouses.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that (1) the Marshals Service and FPS improve the courthouse security information they collect; (2) GSA and AOUSC improve the CSP's transparency and collaboration through better documentation; and (3) GSA establish a working group or other forum to enhance coordination. The agencies concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-17-215](#). For more information, contact Lori Rectanus at (202) 512-2834 or rectanusl@gao.gov.

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FEDERAL COURTHOUSES

Actions Needed to Enhance Capital Security Program and Improve Collaboration

What GAO Found

Three federal agencies—the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AOUSC), the U.S. Marshals Service (Marshals Service), and the Federal Protective Service (FPS)—collect information about security concerns at federal courthouses related to the agencies' respective missions. However, only AOUSC develops information that can be used to understand security concerns across the courthouse portfolio. In contrast, the Marshals Service and FPS collect information on security concerns on a building-by-building basis in varied ways, but the manner in which the information is collected prevents it from being used to understand portfolio-wide security concerns. This is inconsistent with GAO's risk management framework. Both agencies are taking steps to improve their information, but it is not clear whether these improvements will provide the portfolio-wide information stakeholders need to make risk-informed decisions.

The General Services Administration (GSA) has initiated 11 projects at 10 courthouse locations nationwide, as part of its Judiciary Capital Security Program (CSP); two projects have been completed. Local officials said that these projects have already improved or will improve security at the selected courthouses once completed. CSP improvements have been aimed at separating the paths of judges, prisoners, and the public, so that trial participants only meet in the courtroom. Transparency and collaboration issues have emerged among federal stakeholders as the program has been implemented. For example, not all key stakeholders GAO spoke to were clear on the eligibility of specific locations for CSP projects and varied in their views about how collaborative the process to select CSP projects has been. Although stakeholders have taken some steps to improve CSP transparency and collaboration as the program has evolved, some issues remain. Taking additional steps to improve documentation of decision-making and sharing this document with stakeholders could further enhance transparency and collaboration and better assure that all of the agencies and policy makers have the same understanding of how the program is supposed to work, that it is addressing the most urgent courthouse security needs, and that the expertise of all stakeholders is being used to ensure program efficiency.

GAO found that agencies could take additional actions to enhance security at federal courthouses by addressing a related GAO open recommendation, and establishing a formal mechanism such as a working group or forum to enhance coordination and information sharing. Specifically, in 2011, GAO recommended that the agencies update a 1997 memorandum of agreement to clarify their roles and responsibilities. This action has not been done although FPS has taken some steps to start the process. In addition, GAO found that GSA, AOUSC, the Marshals Service, and FPS had not routinely met to address courthouse security issues at a national level where decision-making authority exists. This lack of a formal meeting mechanism inhibits their ability to communicate regularly about their roles and responsibilities and share information about security concerns.

This is a public version of a law enforcement sensitive/limited official use report issued in October 2016.