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Compensating the Victims of Federal Crimes

HIGHLIGHTS FROM GAO-18-203

What is criminal restitution?

Criminals convicted of federal offenses are sometimes required to **compensate victims for their losses.**

This is called **criminal restitution**.

During FY 2014–2016, criminal restitution was ordered for **15% of offenders**.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Sentencing Commission data.

Restitution is ordered for crimes like:

fraud **assault**

whose victims suffer losses like:

stolen money **medical bills**

How is restitution collected?

The Department of Justice (DOJ) is responsible for collecting restitution.

If the offender pays, their payment goes to the U.S. District Court.

The Clerk of the Court pays the victim.

If the offender can pay but doesn't, DOJ can collect using methods such as:

- filing liens against property
- garnishing wages

If the offender can't pay, DOJ suspends collection actions.

How much money do victims receive?

DOJ collected **$2.9 billion** of the **$112.9 billion** owed to victims during FY 2014-2016.

Restitution owed during FY 2014–2016

DOJ suspended collection on **$100 billion** because offenders couldn't pay.

$10 billion was considered "collectable" by DOJ, but was not collected.

DOJ collected **$2.9 billion** from offenders.

Source: GAO analysis of DOJ data.

What do we recommend to DOJ?

Develop and implement a performance measurement system for restitution collection and track progress towards meeting goals.

Ensure that an offender's forfeited assets are used to compensate their victims as appropriate.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
see GAO-18-203 at GAO.GOV.

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