DHS PROGRAM COSTS

Reporting Program-Level Operations and Support Costs to Congress Would Improve Oversight

What GAO Found

O&S costs—the costs used to operate and sustain a program—can account for up to 70 percent of a program’s total cost. End users rely on O&S funds for maintenance, spares, and personnel. DHS programs initially identify O&S costs in their life-cycle cost estimate at the outset of the acquisition. This estimate informs the program’s budget and affects the amount the department designates for the program’s use. In 2015, GAO found that DHS’s budget requests did not reflect all estimated costs—including O&S—for certain programs, which limits visibility for decision makers.

GAO was asked to review O&S activities for major acquisition programs at DHS. This report examines the extent that (1) DHS’s budget management and reporting affects operations and oversight, and (2) cost estimates are comprehensive and accurate, as well as regularly updated.

GAO selected a non-generalizable sample of 11 major acquisition programs, based on asset type and acquisition status, as case studies from selected DHS components. GAO analyzed selected programs’ O&S cost estimates, funding, and spending. In addition, GAO interviewed DHS officials at the headquarters, component, and program office level.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that DHS work with Congress to add program-level O&S funding details to the budget information it provides Congress. DHS concurred.

View GAO-18-344. For more information, contact Marie A. Mak at (202) 515-4841 or makm@gao.gov.