Why GAO Did This Study

Children aged 17 and under in the United States work for various reasons: some are encouraged to work to develop independence and responsibility; others work because of financial need. At the same time, research suggests working children are at risk for work-related injuries and fatalities. GAO was asked to update its 2002 child labor report to discuss the current status of working children in the United States, including those working in agriculture.

This report examines (1) children working in the United States since 2003, (2) work-related fatalities and injuries to such children for the period, and (3) how DOL oversees compliance with the child labor provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. GAO analyzed federal data from several sources, including DOL and other agencies; reviewed relevant federal laws and regulations; and interviewed officials from DOL, including staff in six WHD district offices that were selected based on factors such as investigations with at least one child labor violation, and all five regional offices. GAO also spoke with stakeholders knowledgeable about child labor, such as employer and employee labor groups.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to DOL, including that DOL should evaluate the feasibility of measuring injuries and illnesses to certain worker populations, and establish metrics for child labor-related outreach in agriculture. DOL generally agreed with all four recommendations.

View GAO-19-26. For more information, contact Cindy Brown Barnes at (202) 512-7215 or brownbarnesc@gao.gov, or Steve Morris at (202) 512-3841 or morriss@gao.gov.