Why GAO Did This Study

Recent media reports have detailed incidents at airports where passengers have acted disruptively or violently toward airline customer service agents, who assist passengers checking into their flights and boarding aircraft, among other things. While state and local laws generally prohibit these types of actions, some stakeholders have raised questions about these agents’ safety.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 included a provision that GAO examine passenger violence against airline customer service agents at airports. This report examines (1) what is known about assaults by passengers against customer service agents and (2) stakeholders’ perspectives on the sufficiency of state and local laws and resources to deter and address such incidents. GAO interviewed and reviewed available information from a non-generalizable sample of representatives from five large airports and six large airlines. GAO also interviewed six airport law enforcement agencies, and seven prosecutors’ offices. Further, GAO reviewed documents and interviewed two unions representing customer service agents and five federal agencies with airport safety or security responsibilities. GAO developed and administered a brief, non-generalizable survey to 104 customer service agents working at four selected large airports that GAO visited in March and April 2019. Survey results on customer service agents’ experiences with passengers cannot be used to make inferences about all customer service agents but nevertheless provide valuable insights.