

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-239](#), a report to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Commonly known for protecting the President, the Secret Service also investigates financial and electronic crimes (e.g., counterfeit currency and identity theft). In recent years, Congress and a panel of experts established by the Secretary of Homeland Security have raised concerns that the Secret Service's investigative operations may negatively affect its protective operations.

GAO was asked to review the Secret Service's investigative operations. This report examines, among other things, the extent to which the Secret Service's (1) investigative operations support or negatively affect its protective operations; (2) Office of Investigations has developed a plan to combat its priority criminal threats; and (3) staffing model accounts for federal employee compensation limits. GAO analyzed Secret Service data related to investigation and protection activities from 2014 through 2018; conducted semi-structured interviews with current and former special agents and federal prosecutors; and reviewed Secret Service policies and guidance. This is a public version of a sensitive report that GAO issued in September 2019. Information that the Secret Service deemed sensitive has been omitted.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations, including that the Secret Service establish a documented process to ensure that resources are dedicated to priority criminal threats, identify investigations that address these threats, and ensure compensation limits are accounted for when estimating staffing needs. The Department of Homeland Security concurred with each of GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-20-239](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or goodwin@gao.gov.

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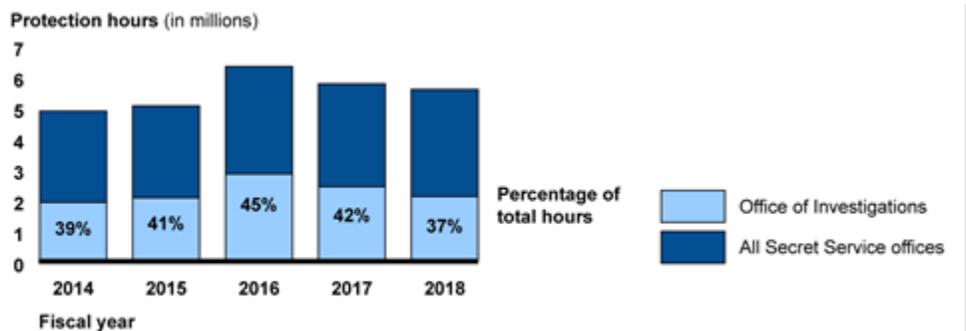
U.S. SECRET SERVICE

Investigative Operations Confer Benefits, but Additional Actions Are Needed to Prioritize Resources

What GAO Found

The operations of the U.S. Secret Service (Secret Service) Office of Investigations, which conducts criminal investigations into financial and electronic crimes, generally support Secret Service protective operations in a variety of ways. For example, special agents in the Office of Investigations perform temporary protective assignments, such as during presidential campaigns or augment protective operations by securing a site in advance of a visit by a protectee. GAO found that personnel in the Office of Investigations spent 11.2 million hours supporting protective operations from fiscal years 2014 through 2018. Most of the 40 current and former special agents GAO interviewed said that their investigative duties did not negatively affect protection. However, over half identified that they were frequently or sometimes required to work on investigations while assigned to temporary protective operations. Details associated with this topic are sensitive and have been omitted from this report.

Hours Expended Agencywide on Protective Operations by U.S. Secret Service Law Enforcement Personnel, Fiscal Years 2014–2018



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Secret Service data. | GAO-20-239

In December 2017, the Secret Service developed a plan to align its resources to combat what it identified as priority criminal threats (e.g., criminal activity with significant economic and financial impacts). However, available documentation of efforts taken does not consistently demonstrate synchronized efforts across the agency to counter the priority criminal threats, as envisioned in the plan. Further, the Secret Service does not have a systematic approach for identifying cases that address priority criminal threats. Absent a documented process for aligning resources and identifying cases, Secret Service will continue to lack assurance that its resources are aligned to combat its priority threats.

The Office of Investigations employs a staffing model to determine how many special agents are needed in its field offices. The staffing model takes into account the number of law enforcement premium pay and standard overtime hours special agents are expected to work. However, it does not consider annual caps on federal employee salaries. As a result, the agency may be underestimating the number of staff needed to meet its workload demands.