

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105183](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

DOD must respond to congressional reporting requirements on various national security topics each year. Congress has expressed concerns with DOD's congressional reporting process, and recent legislation has included provisions to reform and modernize it.

The William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 includes a provision for GAO to examine DOD's current congressional reporting process as well as DOD's ongoing reform and modernization efforts. This report (1) examines the challenges DOD faces with its congressional reporting process; and (2) assesses the extent to which DOD's reform and modernization efforts address these challenges.

GAO analyzed relevant DOD guidance, reform and modernization plans and proposals, cost estimates, and other documentation. GAO also interviewed officials about their experiences and challenges with DOD's congressional reporting process as well as its reform and modernization efforts.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that DOD ensures ASD(LA) (1) consults with internal stakeholders to inform DOD's reform and modernization efforts, and (2) establishes performance measures and outcome-oriented goals, and collects the data needed to assess DOD's progress. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-22-105183](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth A. Field at (202) 512-2775 or [FieldE1@gao.gov](mailto:FieldE1@gao.gov).

February 2022

## DEFENSE MANAGEMENT

### DOD Should Collect More Stakeholder Input and Performance Data on Its Congressional Reporting Process

#### What GAO Found

GAO identified six challenges with the Department of Defense's (DOD) process for responding to congressional reporting requirements, including instances of delays, duplication, and fragmentation. For example, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs (ASD(LA)), which oversees the congressional reporting process and is responsible for identifying reporting requirements, takes as long as 3 to 6 months to do so, according to ASD(LA) officials. ASD(LA) is undertaking a number of efforts to reform and modernize the process. GAO found that these reform and modernization efforts will address or partially address most of the identified challenges with DOD's congressional reporting process. (See table.) For example, ASD(LA) plans to reduce the time required to identify and assign reporting requirements by using spreadsheets of reporting requirements provided by the congressional defense committees.

#### Extent to Which Department of Defense's (DOD) Reform and Modernization Efforts Address Challenges with the Congressional Reporting Process

Challenge	Extent to which DOD's plans address challenge
The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs (ASD(LA)) often takes several months to identify and assign reporting requirements.	●
ASD(LA) does not always accurately assign reporting requirements, and reassignment deliberations are not consistently documented.	◐
DOD officials independently assign and track their reporting requirements using separate systems.	◐
Reports to Congress have been primarily delivered in hard copies.	●
ASD(LA) is not always timely in closing completed reporting requirements.	●
DOD has limited performance data on its process.	○

Legend: ● Addresses; ◐ Partially addresses; ○ Does not address

Source: GAO analysis of DOD information. | [GAO-22-105183](#)

Better stakeholder outreach and performance data could help address the unresolved challenges and improve DOD's efforts. Specifically:

- GAO found that ASD(LA) conducted limited outreach to internal DOD stakeholders in developing its reform efforts, and many stakeholders were not aware of the extent of ASD(LA)'s efforts. Conducting additional outreach could help ASD(LA) more fully address stakeholders' challenges with the process, such as needing to rely on their own separate systems to track congressional reporting requirements.
- GAO also found that ASD(LA) has limited performance data on its congressional reporting process, such as the time that it takes officials to complete various steps of the process. Establishing performance measures and outcome-oriented goals, and collecting the necessary data to assess its progress would better position DOD to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of its reform and modernization efforts and identify additional opportunities for reform.