

Why GAO Did This Study

The Selective Service System is an independent agency in the executive branch. Its responsibilities include maintaining a database that will enable it to provide manpower to DOD in a national emergency, managing a program for conscientious objectors to satisfy their obligations through a program of civilian service, and ensuring the capability to register and induct medical personnel if directed to do so. Section 597 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 (Pub. L. No. 112-81) requires that GAO assess the military necessity of the Selective Service System and examine alternatives to its current structure. Specifically, GAO (1) determined the extent to which DOD has evaluated the necessity of the Selective Service System to meeting DOD's future manpower requirements beyond the all-volunteer force and (2) reviewed the fiscal and national security considerations of various alternatives to the Selective Service System. GAO reviewed legislation, analyzed relevant documents, verified cost data provided by the Selective Service System, and interviewed DOD, Office of Management and Budget, and Selective Service System officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD (1) evaluate its requirements for the Selective Service System in light of recent strategic guidance and (2) establish a process of periodically reevaluating these requirements. In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD agreed with the recommendations.

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NATIONAL SECURITY

DOD Should Reevaluate Requirements for the Selective Service System

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has not recently evaluated the necessity of the Selective Service System to meeting DOD's future manpower requirements for carrying out the defense strategy or reexamined time frames for inducting personnel in the event of a draft. DOD officials told GAO that the Selective Service System provides a low-cost insurance policy in case a draft is ever necessary. The Selective Service System maintains a structure that would help ensure the equity and credibility of a draft. For example, the Selective Service System manages the registration of males aged 18 through 25 and maintains no-cost agreements with organizations that would offer alternative service to conscientious objectors. The Selective Service System also has unpaid volunteers who could be activated as soon as a draft is enacted to review claims for deferment. However, DOD has not used the draft since 1973, and because of its reliance and emphasis on the all-volunteer force, DOD has not reevaluated requirements for the Selective Service System since 1994, although significant changes to the national security environment have occurred since that time. Periodically reevaluating an agency's requirements is critical to helping ensure that resources are appropriately matched to requirements that represent today's environment. Selective Service System officials expressed concern that, as currently resourced, they cannot meet DOD's requirements to deliver inductees without jeopardizing the fairness and equity of the draft. However, the lack of an updated requirement from DOD presents challenges to policymakers for determining whether the Selective Service System is properly resourced or necessary.

Restructuring or disestablishing the Selective Service System would require consideration of various fiscal and national security implications. GAO reviewed data on costs and savings associated with maintaining the Selective Service System's current operations, operating in a deep standby mode with active registration, and disestablishing the Selective Service System altogether.

Estimated Costs and Savings of Current Operations and Alternatives

Dollars in millions

	Maintaining current operations	Deep standby with registration	Disestablishment
Estimated first-year savings	\$0	\$4.8	\$17.9
Estimated recurring savings	\$0	\$6.6	\$24.4
Estimated budget after implementation	\$24.4	\$17.8	\$0

Source: Selective Service System.

Note: Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

If Congress disestablishes the Selective Service System it would need to amend the Military Selective Service Act and potentially other laws involving the Selective Service System. There are also limitations that would need to be considered if Selective Service System functions were transferred to another agency. Selective Service System officials said that while other databases could be used for a registration database, these databases might not lead to a fair and equitable draft because they would not be as complete and would therefore put some portions of the population at a higher risk of being drafted than others.