

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-472](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Justice's (DOJ) USMS is responsible for managing more than 50,000 federal prisoners during criminal proceedings until their acquittal or their conviction and transfer to the Federal Bureau of Prisons to serve their sentence. USMS provides housing, clothing, food, transportation, and medical care. The USMS does not own or manage any of its own facilities and instead relies on a combination of federal, state, local, and privately-managed facilities to house and care for these prisoners. Senate Report 113-78 of the Continuing Appropriations Act of 2014 included a provision for GAO to assess the costs of housing federal inmates and detainees.

This report (1) identifies the primary costs associated with USMS prisoner operations, and the trends in spending from fiscal years 2010 through 2015; (2) assesses recent actions USMS has taken to reduce its prisoner operations costs and how much has been saved; and (3) determines systems USMS has to identify additional opportunities to save costs. GAO analyzed USMS's financial and operational data related to its prisoner operations costs from fiscal year 2010 through 2015, analyzed USMS documentation, and interviewed USMS officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that USMS develop reliable methods for estimating cost savings and validating reported savings achieved, and establish a mechanism to aggregate and analyze the results of annual district self-assessments. USMS concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-16-472](#). For more information, contact Diana Maurer at (202) 512-8777 or maurerd@gao.gov.

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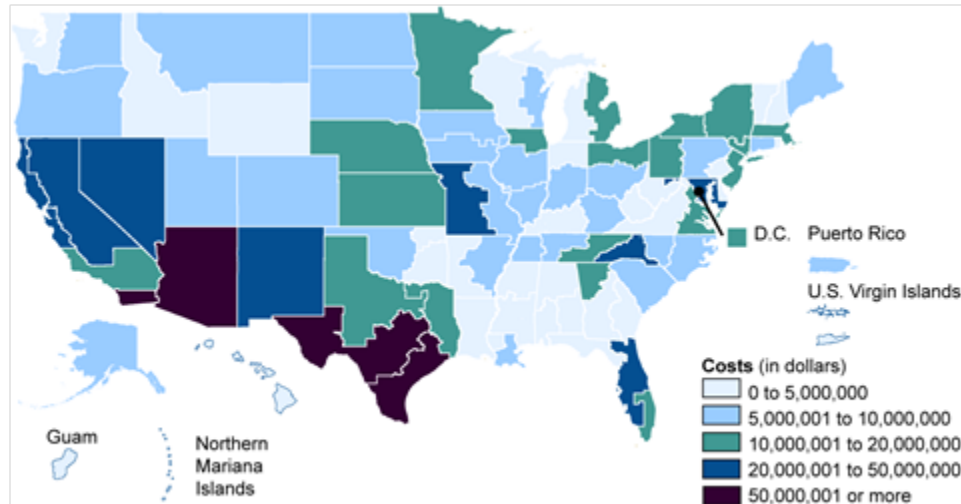
PRISONER OPERATIONS

United States Marshals Service Could Better Estimate Cost Savings and Monitor Efforts to Increase Efficiencies

What GAO Found

From fiscal years 2010 through 2015, the U.S. Marshals Service's (USMS) largest prisoner costs were housing payments to state, local, and private prisons. For example, in fiscal year 2015 USMS spent 86 percent of its \$1.4 billion in prisoner operation costs on housing. While total prisoner costs and prisoner populations decreased since fiscal year 2012, per prisoner costs increased. USMS officials attributed the increase in part to lower than expected prisoner populations, resulting in USMS not filling guaranteed bed space at certain facilities. Also, prisoner costs generally were higher in districts with larger populations and limited use of federal facilities, for which USMS does not pay. Both population and costs were highest in 5 districts along the southwest border (see figure).

United States Marshals Service District Prisoner Costs in Fiscal Year 2015



Source: GAO analysis of USMS detention data; MapInfo (map). | GAO-16-472

USMS has implemented actions that it reports have continued to save prisoner-related costs from fiscal years 2010 through 2015, such as the alternatives to pre-trial detention program to reduce prisoners in USMS's custody. However, for actions with identified savings over this time period, GAO found that about \$654 million of USMS's estimated \$858 million in total savings is not reliable. For example, USMS identified \$375 million in savings from the alternatives to pre-trial detention program for fiscal years 2010 through 2015, but did not verify the data or methodology used to develop the estimate or provide documentation supporting its reported savings for fiscal years 2012 onward. By developing reliable methods for estimating costs and validating savings, USMS would be better positioned to assess the effectiveness of its cost savings efforts.

USMS has designed systems to identify opportunities for cost efficiencies, including savings. For example, the agency requires districts to conduct annual self-assessments of their procedures to identify any deficiencies which could lead to cost savings. However, USMS cannot aggregate and analyze the results of the assessments across districts. Developing a mechanism to do so would better position USMS to identify deficiencies or develop corrective actions that could result in additional cost savings opportunities.