

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-103973](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Sexual assault is a heinous crime that can have lasting, harmful effects on victims, and contradicts the core values that DOD and the Coast Guard expect servicemembers to follow.

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2020 includes a provision for GAO to review the armed forces' implementation of statutory requirements related to sexual assault prevention and response from fiscal years 2004 through 2019. This report identifies and describes the status of each statutory requirement for sexual assault prevention and response contained in the NDAs. It also evaluates the extent to which DOD and the Coast Guard implemented the statutory requirements, and assessed their effectiveness when directed by statute.

GAO reviewed statutory requirements, and assessed information from DOD and the Coast Guard on implementation and effectiveness.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 23 recommendations to improve oversight of DOD's and the Coast Guard's sexual assault prevention and response efforts, including that DOD establish an evaluation plan, and that DOD and the Coast Guard establish mechanisms to track and to document that relevant laws are implemented. DOD and the Department of Homeland Security, the parent agency of the Coast Guard, concurred with all 23 recommendations, and each noted respective actions it was taking to address them.

View [GAO-22-103973](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

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SEXUAL ASSAULT

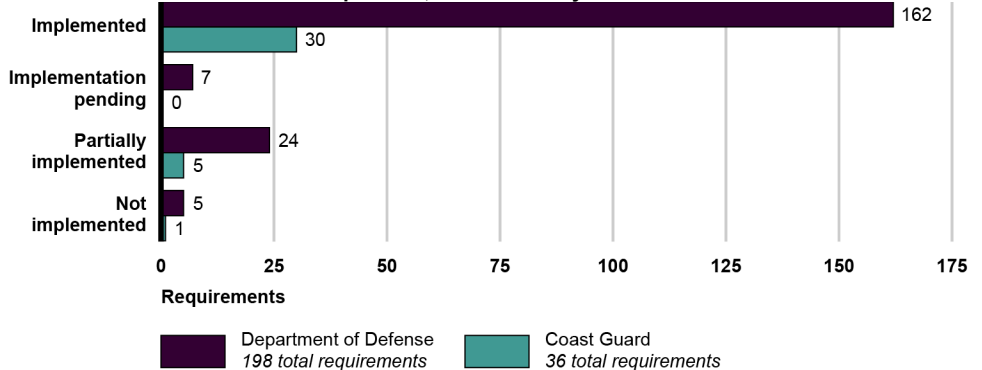
DOD and Coast Guard Should Ensure Laws Are Implemented to Improve Oversight of Key Prevention and Response Efforts

What GAO Found

Congress passed 249 statutory requirements directing the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Coast Guard to address prevention of and response to sexual assault incidents, and most remain in force. The statutory requirements covered four broad categories: Victim Assistance and Advocacy (37 percent); Management and Oversight (33 percent); Military Justice and Investigations (21 percent); and Prevention Efforts (9 percent).

DOD fulfilled most of these statutory requirements, such as establishing comprehensive policies to prevent and respond to sexual assault as well as training for sexual assault forensic and nurse examiners. However, DOD partially implemented 24 requirements and did not implement 5 requirements. (See figure.) For example, DOD did not report certain information in annual reports; establish and implement an evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of the outcomes of its programs and activities related to sexual assault prevention and response; or ensure the tracking of commander compliance for conducting organizational climate assessments.

Implementation Status of Statutory Requirements That the Department of Defense and the Coast Guard Were Directed to Implement, as of February 2022



Source: GAO analysis of National Defense Authorization Acts and agency information. | GAO-22-103973

Until DOD fully implements all of these statutory requirements, such as those related to program evaluations, Congress and DOD may continue to lack necessary data about the effectiveness of programs and activities, which can affect oversight. Additionally, DOD may not ensure compliance with the laws and may not fully implement efforts to support victims and prevent sexual assaults.

The Coast Guard implemented most statutory requirements to prevent and respond to sexual assault. However, the Coast Guard partially implemented five statutory requirements and did not implement one. For example, the Coast Guard established policies for victims who asked to be transferred, but did not meet statutory requirements for timelines to make decisions on whether to transfer victims. In general, without oversight structures that include mechanisms to track and document implementation of statutory requirements, DOD and the Coast Guard may be unable to ensure they are fully meeting their responsibilities to help prevent and respond to sexual assault.