



February 2022

DEFENSE MANAGEMENT

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

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.

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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.

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Abbreviations

ASD(LA)	Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs
CHARRTS	Congressional Hearings and Reporting Requirements Tracking System
DOD	Department of Defense
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NDAA for Fiscal Year 2019	John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019
NDAA for Fiscal Year 2021	William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021

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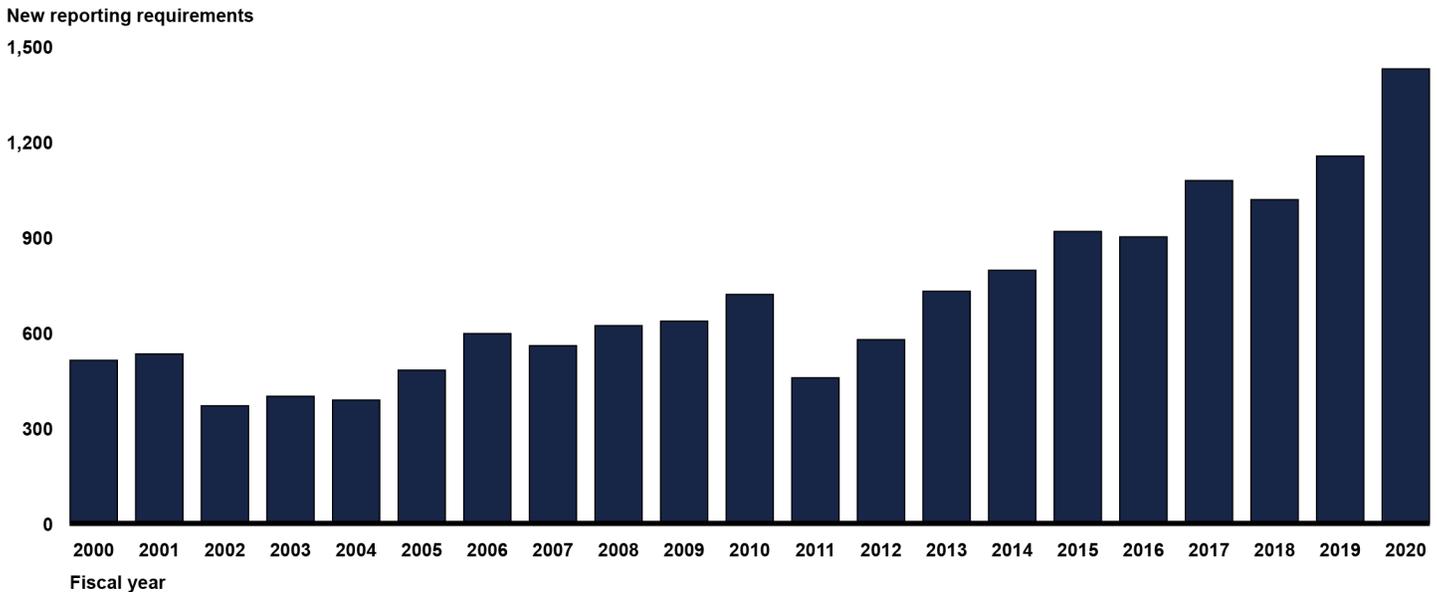


February 10, 2022

Congressional Committees

Each year, the Department of Defense (DOD) must respond to congressional reporting requirements on an array of national security topics. In fiscal year 2021, for example, congressional reporting requirements for DOD directed reports and briefings on topics ranging from risk management in acquisitions to air and missile defense on Guam. According to DOD data, the number of new reporting requirements from Congress has more than doubled from 513 in fiscal year 2000 to 1,429 in fiscal year 2020. (See fig. 1.)

Figure 1: Number of New Department of Defense (DOD) Congressional Reporting Requirements over Time, as Identified by DOD



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data. | GAO-22-105183

These congressional reporting requirements for DOD are contained in legislation, such as the annual national defense authorization act (NDAA), and accompanying House and Senate committee reports.¹ Reporting requirements can be one-time, recurring, or contingent (i.e., triggered by another event). The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs (ASD(LA)) administers and oversees DOD's congressional reporting process.²

Recently, Congress has expressed concerns with DOD's congressional reporting process, and several provisions in recent NDAA's have addressed reforming and modernizing this process. For example, the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 (NDAA for Fiscal Year 2019) required DOD to submit a plan to the congressional defense committees on standardization of its formatting of reports and a briefing on the feasibility of developing a publicly accessible online repository of its unclassified reports.³ More recently, the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (NDAA for Fiscal Year 2021) required DOD to continuously analyze its process for identifying, assigning, and tracking certain congressional reporting requirements, as well as delivering congressional reports.⁴

The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2021 also included a provision for us to examine DOD's current congressional reporting process, as well as the

¹For purposes of this report, consistent with the definition provided in section 1079(d) of the William M. (Mac) Thornberry NDAA for Fiscal Year 2021, the phrase "congressional reporting requirement" means a requirement for an unclassified report or briefing by reason of any provision of Title 10 of the U.S. Code, a provision of any NDAA, a provision of the statement of managers accompanying an NDAA conference report, or a provision of a committee report accompanying an NDAA bill, as reported by the Armed Services Committees of the House or Senate. Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 1079(d) (2021). We also included provisions of defense appropriations acts as well as committee reports, statements of managers, or joint explanatory statements accompanying defense appropriations acts in our definition of congressional reporting requirements, consistent with DOD's process.

²DOD Directive 5142.01, *Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs (ASD(LA))* (Sept. 15, 2006); DOD Instruction 5545.02, *DOD Policy for Congressional Authorization and Appropriations Reporting Requirements* (Dec. 19, 2008).

³Pub. L. No. 115-232 § 874 (2018). The congressional defense committees are the House Committee on Armed Services; the Senate Committee on Armed Services; the House Committee on Appropriations; and the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

⁴Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 908.

department's ongoing efforts to reform and modernize that process.⁵ In this report, we (1) examine the challenges DOD faces with its congressional reporting process; and (2) assess the extent to which DOD's reform and modernization efforts address these challenges.

For our first objective, we reviewed relevant DOD guidance and other documentation, and interviewed ASD(LA) officials about DOD's current congressional reporting process.⁶ We also interviewed DOD component officials about their experience with the process and any challenges they faced.⁷ In total, we interviewed officials from 11 DOD components that collectively accounted for more than 80 percent of DOD's congressional reporting requirements in fiscal year 2020.⁸

For our second objective, we assessed DOD's reform and modernization efforts based on the extent to which they addressed the challenges we identified, recent statutory requirements, and leading practices for federal agency reform efforts.⁹ We reviewed reform and modernization plans and proposals, cost estimates, and other associated documents and interviewed officials from ASD(LA), the Office of the Chief Information Officer, and Defense Information Systems Agency regarding congressional reporting reform and modernization efforts DOD is

⁵Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 1079.

⁶See, for example, DOD Directive 5142.01; DOD Instruction 5545.02; and Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative Affairs), *A Report on Reports: Proposals for Reforming the Department of Defense's Congressional Reports Process* (Washington, D.C.: May 28, 2019).

⁷"DOD components" refers to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Military Departments, the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff, the Combatant Commands, the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Defense, the Defense Agencies, the DOD Field Activities, and all other organizational entities within DOD. See DOD Directive 5100.01, *Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components* (Dec. 21, 2010) (incorporating change 1, effective Sept. 17, 2020). For the purposes of this review, we also considered offices within the Office of the Secretary of Defense to be separate DOD components.

⁸Specifically, we interviewed officials from the Office of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation, the Office of the General Counsel, and the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security based on their subject matter expertise and assigned roles in DOD's congressional reporting process. We interviewed officials from the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Air Force, the Joint Staff, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), and the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy based on their role in responding to congressional reporting requirements.

⁹GAO, *Government Reorganization: Key Questions to Assess Agency Reform Efforts*, [GAO-18-427](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 13, 2018).

implementing or considering. We also interviewed officials from the aforementioned 11 DOD components about their views on these reform and modernization efforts, including their level of involvement and changes they would like to see to DOD's current process.

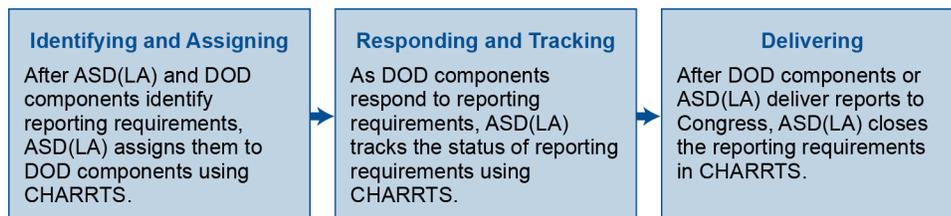
We conducted this performance audit from April 2021 to February 2022 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

DOD's Current Congressional Reporting Process

As seen in figure 2, ASD(LA) and DOD components work together to address congressional reporting requirements, with ASD(LA) managing the process.

Figure 2: Department of Defense (DOD) Congressional Reporting Process and Associated Functions



ASD(LA) Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs
CHARRTS Congressional Hearings and Reporting Requirements Tracking System

Source: GAO analysis of DOD information. | GAO-22-105183

Identifying and assigning. ASD(LA) officials review authorization and appropriation acts and committee reports to identify reporting requirements for DOD. DOD component officials also independently review legislation to identify reporting requirements and make recommendations concerning assignments by submitting a preliminary list of accepted reporting requirements to ASD(LA). ASD(LA) officials then assign components reporting requirements through the Congressional Hearing and Reporting Requirements Tracking System (CHARRTS). If DOD component officials request reassignment of a reporting requirement to another component, ASD(LA) officials decide which DOD component is responsible for responding to the reporting requirement.

According to DOD component officials, DOD components further assign reporting requirements within their components to the appropriate offices of primary responsibility.

Responding and tracking. As DOD components prepare reports and briefings in response to congressional reporting requirements, they provide ASD(LA) with status updates using CHARRTS. ASD(LA) officials provide DOD components with assistance, as necessary, and monitor CHARRTS to track the status of reporting requirements. If a report or briefing is overdue, DOD component officials told us they decide whether to submit an interim report to Congress. If DOD components proceed with an interim report, an electronic copy of the interim report is also uploaded into CHARRTS for ASD(LA) officials' awareness. After DOD components complete a report in response to a congressional reporting requirement, the report is coordinated within DOD for review and signatures, and an electronic copy is uploaded into CHARRTS.

Delivering. The majority of DOD components we interviewed told us they can either deliver a report directly to Congress or ASD(LA) can deliver it on their behalf. DOD component officials also upload electronic copies of the reports and transmittal letters into CHARRTS and submit requests to ASD(LA) to close reporting requirements in the system.

The Congressional Hearings and Reporting Requirements Tracking System (CHARRTS)

DOD's primary congressional reporting requirements tracking system, CHARRTS, is a more than 20-year old application developed within DOD. ASD(LA) and DOD component officials told us ASD(LA) officials manually enter data for each congressional reporting requirement into CHARRTS, creating a "card" for the reporting requirement that includes information about the requirement such as the requirement's legal citation and due date. One DOD component told us they receive email notifications when a reporting requirement has been assigned to them. Components can then access CHARRTS to examine their assigned reporting requirements, and one DOD component official said they can also enter notes to document the status of their responses to reporting requirements, and upload documents such as interim reports, transmittal letters, and copies of the final reports. CHARRTS is also used by DOD to locate and retrieve reports previously delivered to Congress.

Recent Congressional Direction Regarding Process Reforms

As noted earlier, several provisions in recent NDAs have required DOD to take actions related to reforming and modernizing its congressional reporting process. The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2019 included a provision requiring DOD to submit a plan related to standardizing the formatting of

its reports.¹⁰ This plan was to include a description of methods for, among other things, ensuring reports could be indexed and downloaded by common web search applications, as well as a cost estimate and schedule for implementation. The provision also required DOD to examine the feasibility of developing a publicly accessible online repository of previously issued unclassified reports, along with a cost estimate and schedule for implementation. More recently, the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2021 required DOD to conduct an ongoing analysis of its congressional reporting process, in consultation with DOD's Chief Information Officer, to continuously identify opportunities for modernization.¹¹

Delays, Duplication, and Fragmentation Mark DOD's Congressional Reporting Process

We identified six challenges with DOD's congressional reporting process, including challenges related to delays, duplication, and fragmentation.¹² These challenges stem in part from limitations with DOD's congressional reporting requirements tracking system, CHARRTS.

1. **ASD(LA) often takes several months to identify and assign reporting requirements.** ASD(LA) officials told us it can take 3 to 6 months to identify reporting requirements in legislation and assign them to DOD components. To minimize the impact of this delay, DOD component officials also independently review legislation to identify reporting requirements that they are likely to be assigned. Officials from seven of the 11 DOD components we interviewed told us they can complete their targeted reviews in considerably less time than ASD(LA) (i.e., days or weeks as opposed to months), which allows for more time to prepare their reports. While DOD component officials said that having both ASD(LA) and DOD components review legislation helps ensure all the reporting requirements are identified, it also represents a duplicative effort.
2. **ASD(LA) does not always accurately assign reporting requirements, and reassignment deliberations are not consistently documented.** According to DOD component officials, ASD(LA) often inaccurately assigns responsibility for reporting

¹⁰Pub. L. No. 115-232, § 874.

¹¹See Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 908.

¹²Duplication occurs when more than one federal agency (or organizations within an agency) is engaged in the same activities or provide the same services. Fragmentation refers to circumstances in which more than one federal agency (or organizations within an agency) is involved in the same broad area. See GAO, *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*, [GAO-15-49SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 14, 2015).

requirements. ASD(LA) officials we spoke with said that they sometimes find it difficult to identify to whom they should assign a reporting requirement. DOD component officials told us inaccurate assignments are due to inconsistent or ambiguous terminology in the legislation, a lack of clarity regarding Congress' intention, and uncertainty within DOD regarding which component is best suited to respond. While officials from one DOD component told us that ASD(LA) assigns more than 90 percent of reporting requirements correctly, officials from three other DOD components told us they typically contest 10 to 20 percent, 10 to 25 percent, and 25 to 50 percent of reporting requirements they are assigned by ASD(LA).

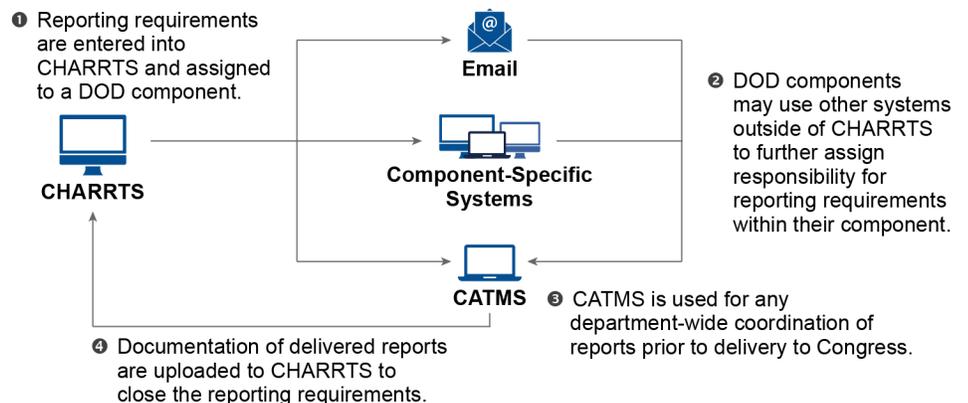
In addition, a DOD component official said that ASD(LA) does not consistently document deliberations between ASD(LA) and DOD components regarding reporting requirement assignments in CHARRTS. Specifically, when there are disagreements about assignments, those disagreements are usually resolved through email exchanges between the DOD components and ASD(LA) outside of CHARRTS. Records of those deliberations are not captured in CHARRTS, only the final outcome. An official from one DOD component told us that the lack of documentation results in components having less contextual information regarding assignments and can lead to duplicative efforts and delays in assignments. For example, one DOD component official said two offices of primary responsibility may be assigned a reporting requirement in CHARRTS. Without additional context, the DOD component official told us it may be unclear whether it was an error or if it was intentional because input from both components is needed, and clarifying this requires additional time.

- 3. DOD officials independently assign and track their reporting requirements using separate systems.** We also identified fragmentation in DOD's congressional reporting process. Rather than having one system to assign and track congressional reporting requirements, DOD relies on multiple systems. While ASD(LA) uses CHARRTS to assign and track reporting requirements, DOD component officials told us they rely less on CHARRTS and more on component-specific systems to internally assign and track their reporting requirements. For example, the Army and Joint Staff use the Task Management Tool; the Navy uses the Department of the Navy Tracker System; and the Office of the Secretary of Defense uses the Correspondence and Task Management System. The Correspondence and Task Management System is also used by

components for any department-wide coordination and review of reports.

DOD component officials told us CHARRTS, however, is not interoperable with component-specific systems. Consequently, DOD component officials said they must manually copy information from CHARRTS into their respective systems to internally assign and track reporting requirements, representing another instance of duplication. Officials from five of 11 DOD components we interviewed told us they also maintain a separate spreadsheet to help track the status of their respective components' reporting requirements; these spreadsheets can include additional details such as what related information has already been provided to Congress, internal points of contact, and suspense dates. By the time DOD delivers a report or briefing to Congress, it likely will have touched multiple systems, as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3: Systems Used in the Department of Defense (DOD) Congressional Reporting Process



CHARRTS Congressional Hearings and Reporting Requirements Tracking System
 CATMS Correspondence and Task Management System

Source: GAO analysis of DOD information. | GAO-22-105183

The challenge of having separate systems to assign and track reporting requirements is compounded by the way individual reporting requirements are identified. Individual reporting requirements are identified in CHARRTS using the reporting requirement's legal citation. When reporting requirements are subsequently amended, the identifiers no longer align with the most current and applicable citations. This misalignment can contribute to confusion within DOD. As a result, ASD(LA) officials

often need to examine multiple pieces of legislation to discern substantive changes to existing reporting requirements in order to accurately communicate this information to the applicable DOD components.

4. **Reports to Congress have been primarily delivered in hard copies.** Section 480 of Title 10, U.S. Code, provides for the submission of copies of certain reports to Congress in an electronic medium.¹³ DOD documents indicated that DOD interprets section 480 to mean that hard copies are the default method of delivery to Congress for unclassified reports. According to ASD(LA) and DOD component officials, delivering hard copies of reports requires more time and resources than delivering electronic copies of reports. In comparison, receipt of electronic copies can be more readily confirmed, and electronic copies of reports can be more easily shared and archived. Congressional committee staff also told us that receiving hard copies of reports presents challenges, including not having a way to easily locate and access previously delivered reports.¹⁴
5. **ASD(LA) is not always timely in closing completed reporting requirements.** DOD component officials told us ASD(LA) sometimes does not close reporting requirements in a timely manner in CHARRTS. As a result, CHARRTS would indicate that a report or briefing was late even if it had been delivered to Congress on time. ASD(LA) is responsible for closing reporting requirements in CHARRTS. DOD component officials told us that ASD(LA) will not close a reporting requirement without obtaining a corresponding transmittal letter and will not accept other evidence of the report or briefing being delivered, such as a courier receipt, which sometimes exacerbates these delays.
6. **DOD has limited performance data on its process.** We also found that DOD has limited performance data on its congressional reporting process—including data on the time and resources involved in its

¹³Specifically, section 480 provides that whenever the Secretary of Defense or any other DOD official submits to Congress (or any committee of either House of Congress) a report that the Secretary (or other official) is required by law to submit, the Secretary (or other official) shall provide to Congress (or such committee) a copy of the report in an electronic medium. The requirement does not apply to a report submitted in classified form. 10 U.S.C. § 480.

¹⁴According to ASD(LA) and DOD component officials, as a result of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the shift to teleworking by much of DOD's workforce, more reports were delivered electronically than were delivered in hard copy in fiscal year 2021.

process as well as the effectiveness of its process—and does not consistently use the data it does have to monitor its performance.

As noted in the previously mentioned challenges, certain parts of DOD’s current process, such as identifying and assigning reporting requirements, require significant time and associated personnel costs. While ASD(LA) officials were able to estimate the time required to identify and assign reporting requirements in recent years, they told us they do not regularly collect and monitor these data.

In addition, while DOD tracks the cost of preparing individual reports, those reported costs do not include all costs associated with the congressional reporting process.¹⁵ DOD estimates, and discloses on the report cover, the cost of individual reports using an Office of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation tool, but these estimates do not include all aspects of the congressional reporting process.¹⁶ For example, according to the Office of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation, the estimates omit the costs associated with identifying, assigning, tracking, and delivering the reports, as well as the department-wide coordination and review of reports prior to their delivery.¹⁷

ASD(LA) also has not consistently collected and monitored data on the effectiveness of the congressional reporting process, such as the timeliness of reports. ASD(LA) officials use CHARRTS to monitor the status of congressional reporting, including reports that are past their due dates. However, DOD component officials stated that this monitoring was inconsistent. ASD(LA) officials also stated that timeliness is not tracked or reported consistently and that interest in this data varies based on leadership priorities. In addition, ASD(LA) officials told us that monitoring the timeliness of reports can be difficult, because approximately two-thirds of DOD’s active

¹⁵The Secretary of Defense directed that, effective February 1, 2011, all new proposals or initiatives will include a cost estimate, and every report or study will include the cost of that report or study on the front cover. See Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Consideration of Costs in DOD Decision-Making* (Dec. 27, 2010).

¹⁶The Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation tool calculates the approximate costs associated with preparing and publishing a study or report. It was created to improve the transparency of costs associated with reports or studies sponsored or prepared by DOD.

¹⁷Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation officials cautioned against using the cost estimating tool to derive an overall cost estimate of DOD responding to congressional reporting requirements, noting that the methodology was not designed for that purpose. Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation officials also stated that the accuracy of the cost estimate is highly dependent on the accuracy of the data inputs, which are the responsibility of the component preparing the report.

congressional reporting requirements are contingent (i.e., triggered by another event or report) and therefore do not have specific due dates.

Better Stakeholder Outreach and Performance Data Could Improve DOD's Reform Efforts

ASD(LA) Has Ongoing and Planned Reforms to Its Congressional Reporting Process

ASD(LA) is undertaking a number of efforts to reform and modernize its congressional reporting process. Specifically, ASD(LA) is at varying stages of: (1) streamlining the process for identifying reporting requirements by obtaining consolidated spreadsheets of reporting requirements from the congressional defense committees; (2) enabling electronic delivery of unclassified reports to Congress; and (3) establishing a database of delivered reports that is accessible to Congress, and is making changes to its systems to enable these efforts.

In response to a requirement in the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2019, ASD(LA) prepared and delivered a report to the congressional defense committees proposing reforms to DOD's congressional reporting process.¹⁸ The report proposed, among other things, standardizing the identification and tracking of reports; prioritizing the electronic delivery of reports; and creating a database of delivered reports. ASD(LA)'s May 2019 report did not include cost estimates or a schedule for implementing these reforms, which the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2019 required. However, ASD(LA)'s reform and modernization efforts in these areas have continued to evolve and now include efforts to develop cost estimates and schedules for these reform efforts.

ASD(LA) subsequently worked with the DOD Chief Information Officer and the Defense Information Systems Agency to explore options to replace CHARRTS, which ASD(LA) determined was necessary to enable its reform and modernization efforts. ASD(LA), Chief Information Officer, and Defense Information Systems Agency officials conducted market

¹⁸Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative Affairs), *A Report on Reports: Proposals for Reforming the Department of Defense's Congressional Reports Process* (Washington, D.C.: May 28, 2019).

research, drafted documents outlining requirements, and developed a cost estimate for a replacement for CHARRTS. The draft requirements addressed many areas of congressional interest, including a proposal on developing a database of unclassified delivered reports that would be accessible to Congress. According to an ASD(LA) official, this effort also will help fulfill the requirement in the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2021 for DOD to analyze on an ongoing basis, in consultation with the Chief Information Officer, its process for identifying, assigning, and tracking congressional reporting requirements, as well as delivering congressional reports.¹⁹

ASD(LA) officials told us they decided to use Salesforce, a cloud-based customer relationship management system, to enable their reform and modernization efforts, and that Salesforce may be used to replace CHARRTS in the longer term. ASD(LA) currently uses Salesforce for other purposes, including tracking interactions with members of Congress and their staff. ASD(LA) officials told us they initially plan to use Salesforce to enable their reform efforts by recording reporting requirements received from the congressional defense committees and sharing final reports with those committees using the system.²⁰

ASD(LA) officials told us they may further customize Salesforce to increase its capabilities, such as adding the ability to assign reporting requirements to DOD components, which is currently done in CHARRTS. An ASD(LA) official further told us that ASD(LA) has not yet determined whether or not the customization of Salesforce would require contractor support or the estimated cost of that contractor support. According to ASD(LA) documentation, the initial cost to acquire and configure Salesforce was less than \$210,000, and its current cost of operating and maintaining Salesforce is less than \$250,000 annually. An ASD(LA) official told us in December 2021 that DOD had not yet established a schedule for its planned updates to Salesforce, in part because staffing shortages in ASD(LA) had limited officials' ability to focus on this effort. That official also told us that ASD(LA) expects to hire additional staff to

¹⁹See Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 908.

²⁰An ASD(LA) official told us that it would be feasible to use the congressional-facing database of reports as the basis for a publically accessible database, but that their priority was to first develop the congressional-facing database. The ASD(LA) official and other DOD officials we interviewed noted that there would be security concerns that would need to be resolved with opening such a system to the public, including ensuring that only reports cleared for public release are available on the system and addressing the potential that information contained in reports could be combined in a way that produces sensitive information.

address those shortages in the coming months and anticipates beginning work on updates to Salesforce in early calendar year 2022.

In the interim, ASD(LA) has also been working with the Defense Information Systems Agency to enhance existing capabilities in CHARRTS, such as importing information on reporting requirements from the consolidated spreadsheets provided by the congressional defense committees. ASD(LA) and Defense Information Systems Agency officials told us these enhancements are part of a larger initiative to migrate CHARRTS to a more modern software framework to address a number of identified cybersecurity concerns, which is also expected to extend the useful life of the system. According to the Defense Information Systems Agency documents, these enhancements and migration are expected to be completed in February 2022 and to cost between \$400,000 and \$550,000.

DOD's Reform Efforts Address Most, but Not All, of the Challenges with Its Congressional Reporting Process

We found that ASD(LA)'s ongoing and planned reform and modernization efforts will address or partially address most of the identified challenges with its congressional reporting process. (See table 1.) For example, the Senate and House Armed Services Committees have begun to provide ASD(LA) with consolidated spreadsheets of congressional reporting requirements, and DOD is developing the capability to import those spreadsheets into CHARRTS and Salesforce.²¹ Doing so would significantly reduce the amount of time it takes ASD(LA) to identify and assign reporting requirements.

²¹According to DOD data, about 74 percent of congressional reporting requirements for fiscal year 2020 were associated with the Senate and House Armed Services Committees. ASD(LA) officials told us they plan to also work with the Senate and House Appropriations committees to obtain spreadsheets of congressional reporting requirements from those committees.

Table 1: Extent to Which the 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	DOD’s plans for addressing challenge
The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs (ASD(LA)) often takes several months to identify and assign reporting requirements.	●	The Senate and House Armed Services Committees are providing ASD(LA) with consolidated spreadsheets of congressional reporting requirements found in bills, committee reports, and conference reports. The fields in the spreadsheets identify the source, the type of reporting requirement, the reporting deadline, and the DOD component to whom the requirements are assigned. DOD is developing the capability to import these spreadsheets into the Congressional Hearings and Reporting Requirements Tracking System (CHARRTS) and future tracking systems (i.e., Salesforce).
ASD(LA) does not always accurately assign reporting requirements, and reassignment deliberations are not consistently documented.	◐	The consolidated spreadsheets of reporting requirements provided by the Senate and House Armed Services Committees could help reduce the number of incorrect assignments, as the spreadsheets identify the DOD organization assigned the reporting requirement. However, DOD’s current reform and modernization efforts will not change DOD’s limited documentation of assignment-related deliberations in CHARRTS.
DOD officials independently assign and track their reporting requirements using separate systems.	◐	DOD does not have plans to address DOD components’ use of separate systems to assign and track their respective reporting requirements nor issues with their systems’ interoperability with CHARRTS. DOD is reprogramming CHARRTS to address cybersecurity concerns and to incorporate the spreadsheet import feature. ASD(LA) plans to import reporting requirements received from congressional defense committees into both CHARRTS and Salesforce, while continuing to use CHARRTS to assign reporting requirements to DOD components. ASD(LA) and the congressional defense committees are developing a serial number system to provide consistent identifiers for reporting requirements; this also would minimize existing confusion when reporting requirements are amended.
Reports to Congress have been primarily delivered in hard copies.	●	ASD(LA) submitted a proposal as a part of the fiscal year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act legislative cycle to amend section 480 of Title 10, U.S. Code to clarify delivery of reports in electronic format rather than in hard copy. DOD’s proposal to amend section 480 was not enacted, and DOD did not resubmit the proposal in subsequent years. DOD officials told us they plan to deliver reports to Congress electronically going forward, regardless of whether the statute is amended. DOD plans to use Salesforce to deliver electronic copies of reports to Congress, but may additionally send hard copies of reports if requested.
ASD(LA) is not always timely in closing completed reporting requirements.	●	ASD(LA) will use Salesforce to deliver reports to Congress. According to ASD(LA) officials, Salesforce will eventually eliminate the need to manually close out individual congressional reporting requirements.
DOD has limited performance data on its process.	○	ASD(LA) officials told us they expect improvements in cost savings and timeliness as a result of their reform and modernization efforts, but do not have plans in place for assessing these anticipated outcomes.

Legend:

- Addresses
- ◐ Partially addresses
- Does not address

Source: GAO analysis of DOD information. | GAO-22-105183

DOD's planned reform and modernization efforts are expected to address or partially address most of the identified challenges, but DOD has opportunities to address the remaining challenges by (1) expanding outreach to internal stakeholders and (2) improving performance data on its congressional reporting process.

Expanding outreach to internal stakeholders. We found that DOD's planned reform and modernization efforts partially address two challenges that relate to the relationship between the ASD(LA)-managed congressional reporting process and individual DOD components' processes and systems. Specifically:

- DOD's planned reform and modernization efforts only partially address inaccuracies in ASD(LA)'s reporting requirement assignments and DOD component officials' desire for additional documentation of reassignment deliberations. Officials from two DOD components we interviewed told us that incorporating records of deliberations over the assignment of a given requirement would provide additional context and that having this information readily available in CHARRTS could help avoid duplicative efforts. DOD component officials also described other changes they would like to see in CHARRTS, such as more informative email notifications so that relevance can be more readily discerned and prioritized.
- DOD's planned reform and modernization efforts do not fully address the challenges that arise from DOD components independently assigning and tracking reporting requirements using separate systems that are not interoperable. As noted earlier, DOD component officials told us this process requires manually entering information on individual reporting requirements across various systems, reflecting both fragmentation and duplication.

These challenges have not been fully addressed, in part, because ASD(LA) officials have not consulted with internal stakeholders in developing their reform and modernization efforts. Officials from 10 of the 11 DOD components we interviewed were not aware of the extent of ASD(LA)'s reform efforts, and, of those, only one was aware that ASD(LA) was pursuing a possible replacement for CHARRTS. In contrast, ASD(LA) has consulted with congressional staff on its reform and modernization efforts, and this outreach has informed ASD(LA)'s planned approach.

Among the leading practices for federal agency reform efforts that we have identified is consulting with relevant internal and external

stakeholders—including agency employees and Congress—to develop reforms.²² These leading practices also note the importance of addressing fragmentation, overlap, and duplication in reform efforts. ASD(LA) officials told us they have not coordinated their reform and modernization efforts with internal stakeholders because they did not yet have a clearly defined approach to share with those stakeholders. However, by delaying this coordination, ASD(LA) increases the likelihood of pursuing reform and modernization efforts that are not fully responsive to stakeholder needs. Given the integral role that DOD components play in responding to congressional reporting requirements, addressing the concerns of those stakeholders could more fully address the challenges with the current process that we identified—including duplication and fragmentation—and improve the congressional reporting process for all stakeholders.

Improving performance data on DOD’s congressional reporting process. DOD’s ability to assess the benefits and progress of its reform and modernization efforts, as well as identify and prioritize additional areas for reform, is hindered without better performance data, including data on the time and resources involved in its process or the effectiveness of its process. DOD could improve its reform and modernization efforts by improving its performance data on its current process, including establishing clear performance measures and outcome-oriented goals.

In its May 2019 report proposing reforms to the congressional reporting process, ASD(LA) identified several objectives for its efforts, including achieving time and cost savings. ASD(LA) also proposed reforms that are likely to help achieve these objectives.²³ For example, according to an ASD(LA) official, receiving consolidated spreadsheets of reporting requirements from congressional defense committees and importing that information directly into CHARRTS or Salesforce would reduce ASD(LA)’s reliance on manual reviews of legislation to identify reporting requirements. ASD(LA) officials identified the 3 to 6 months that it takes each year to identify and assign reporting requirements as one of the most time-intensive parts of the congressional reporting process. Similarly, delivering reports electronically to Congress would reduce the

²²[GAO-18-427](#).

²³Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative Affairs), *A Report on Reports: Proposals for Reforming the Department of Defense’s Congressional Reports Process* (Washington, D.C.: May 28, 2019).

time and associated costs devoted to preparing hard copies of reports, which DOD component officials indicated can be substantial.

Our leading practices for federal agency reform efforts highlight the important role of using data to support the development, implementation, and monitoring of reform efforts. These practices include establishing performance measures, outcome-oriented goals, and collecting data to evaluate the reforms against those goals.²⁴ While ASD(LA) has identified objectives for its reform efforts, such as achieving time and cost savings and improving the timeliness of reports, an ASD(LA) official told us they have not established performance measures and outcome-oriented goals that align with these objectives, such as specific targets for time and cost savings or report timeliness. ASD(LA)'s ability to establish performance measures and outcome-oriented goals is limited because it does not consistently collect and use performance data—such as data on the time and resources involved in the congressional reporting process or the effectiveness of the process—that would better enable it to do so. ASD(LA) officials stated that they do not consistently measure the performance of the congressional reporting process against outcome-oriented goals and agreed that they could make improvements in this area.

By establishing performance measures and outcome-oriented goals, and collecting the necessary data to assess progress toward achieving its goals, DOD would be better positioned to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of its reform and modernization efforts. In addition, collecting performance data, such as the time that it takes ASD(LA) and DOD components to complete various parts of the congressional reporting process, would enable DOD to identify and prioritize additional opportunities for reform and modernization. ASD(LA) has an ongoing need for relevant performance data, especially in light of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2021's requirement for DOD to analyze its congressional reporting process on an ongoing basis and identify opportunities to optimize and otherwise modernize the process.²⁵ Routinely collecting and evaluating data on DOD's congressional reporting process would help enable and enhance ASD(LA)'s reform and modernization efforts.

²⁴[GAO-18-427](#).

²⁵See Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 908.

Conclusions

ASD(LA) has developed plans to reform and modernize its congressional reporting process and has begun to implement some of those reforms. These efforts have the potential to address long-standing challenges that DOD, Congress, and we have identified, such as reducing the time that it takes each year to identify reporting requirements and modernizing the delivery of reports to Congress. However, some challenges remain. ASD(LA)'s planned reform efforts leave some concerns of internal stakeholders unresolved, including DOD's fragmented approach to tracking congressional reporting requirements. Greater stakeholder engagement would help DOD reform and modernize its congressional reporting process to better meet the needs of all stakeholders. In addition, as ASD(LA) embarks on these reforms, establishing performance measures and outcome-oriented goals, and routinely collecting the necessary data to assess progress toward achieving its goals would help ASD(LA) evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of its efforts and identify what, if any, additional reform efforts should be pursued.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following two recommendations to DOD:

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs consults with internal stakeholders to inform DOD's congressional reporting reform and modernization efforts, including identifying opportunities to address stakeholders' challenges and better manage duplication and fragmentation within DOD's congressional reporting process. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs, as part of DOD's reform and modernization efforts, establishes performance measures and outcome-oriented goals, and collects the necessary data to assess progress toward achieving those goals. (Recommendation 2)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. In its written comments, which are reproduced in appendix I, DOD concurred with our recommendations and described planned efforts to address them.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees and to the Secretary of Defense and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs. In addition, the report is available at no charge on our website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-2775 or FieldE1@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this are listed in appendix II.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth A. Field". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Elizabeth A. Field
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

List of Committees

The Honorable Jack Reed
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The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chairman
The Honorable Richard C. Shelby
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
The Honorable Mike Rogers
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chair
The Honorable Ken Calvert
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Defense



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1300

January 20, 2022

Ms. Elizabeth Field
Director, Defense Capabilities Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Field,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-22-105183, 'DEFENSE MANAGEMENT: DoD Should Collect More Stakeholder Input and Performance Data on Its Congressional Reporting Process,' dated December 22, 2021 (GAO Code 105183).

Please find our attached concurrence on the Draft Report's recommendations. My point of contact for this office is Mr. Ryan W. Reilly, Director of Operations at (703) 614-8423 of ryan.w.reilly.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,



Louis I. Lauter
Performing the Duties of Assistant
Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED DECEMBER 22, 2021
GAO-22-105183 (GAO CODE 105183)

“DEFENSE MANAGEMENT: DOD SHOULD COLLECT MORE STAKEHOLDER
INPUT AND PERFORMANCE DATA ON ITS CONGRESSIONAL REPORTING
PROCESS”

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs (ASD-LA) consults with internal stakeholders to inform DOD’s congressional reporting reform and modernization efforts, including identifying opportunities to address stakeholders’ challenges and better manage duplication and fragmentation within DOD’s congressional reporting process. (Recommendation 1)

DoD RESPONSE: DoD concurs. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs (OASD-LA) will work collaboratively with all components on ways to better address the identification, assignment and completion of reporting requirements. Improvements could include crowd-sourcing the review of bills to more effectively identify and assign reporting requirements. In addition, components should be tasked with reviewing the bills and committee reports to identify a preferred component for primary responsibility and an alternate.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs, as part of DOD’s reform and modernization efforts, establishes performance measures and outcome-oriented goals, and collects the necessary data to assess progress toward achieving those goals. (Recommendation 2)

DoD RESPONSE: DoD concurs. Automation should be incorporated in data processing systems for the express purpose of collecting and analyzing performance data. Additionally, the policy governing reformed business processes should include: (1) performance goals and metrics to increase timeliness of completing congressional reporting requirements, and (2) workload and cost data for both individual reports and the overall congressional reporting process. Assessment is key to any process improvement initiative. Goals and objectives are only as good as the quality surveillance management plan and data available to measure success. Any automated system must have metrics to assess performance aligned with those goals and objectives. The CHARRTS system currently being used is not designed for that function and needs to be modernized

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Elizabeth A. Field, (202) 512-2775 or FieldE1@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Marc Schwartz (Assistant Director), Daniel Ramsey (Analyst-in-Charge), David Jones, Clarice Ransom, and Tasha Straszewski made key contributions to this report. Other contributors included Rashmi Agarwal, Juliee Conde-Medina, Michael Holland, Michael Silver, and Jack Wang.

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