

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-107038](#), a testimony before the Quality of Life Panel, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Poor living conditions in military housing decrease quality of life for service members and their families and can negatively affect military readiness. In recent years, reports of poor living conditions in government-owned barracks and military family housing owned and operated by private companies have raised questions about DOD's oversight of its military housing program.

This statement examines DOD's management of its housing programs, specifically the department's (1) military barracks program, and (2) privatized family housing program.

This statement is based on GAO's September 2023 report on military barracks conditions and its April 2023 report on privatized military family housing. To perform that work, GAO reviewed DOD documentation, analyzed data, interviewed DOD officials, and assessed DOD's efforts against relevant criteria. GAO also toured military housing and conducted discussion groups with housing residents during site visits to selected military installations.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO made 31 recommendations in its September 2023 report and 19 recommendations in its April 2023 report. Regarding barracks, GAO recommended that DOD improve guidance and increase oversight. Regarding privatized family housing, GAO recommended DOD clarify guidance and training on efforts to increase assistance to residents and improve home inspection standards. DOD generally concurred with the recommendations and described ongoing actions.

View [GAO-23-107038](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth A. Field at (202) 512-2775 or [FieldE1@gao.gov](mailto:FieldE1@gao.gov).

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## MILITARY HOUSING

### Strengthened Oversight Needed to Make and Sustain Improvements to Living Conditions

## What GAO Found

Junior-enlisted service members without dependents (e.g., a spouse or child) typically live in military-managed barracks. GAO reported in September 2023 that some barracks pose serious health and safety risks. As part of site visits to selected installations, GAO observed a variety of living conditions that service members and unit leaders stated were negatively affecting their quality of life, such as sewage overflow, mold and mildew, and broken windows and locks.

#### Potentially Serious Health and Safety Risks at GAO Site Visit Locations



Source: Department of Defense (left); GAO (all others). | GAO-23-107038

GAO found numerous challenges in the Department of Defense's (DOD) approach to managing its barracks, including the following:

- DOD standards for health and safety in barracks were not well defined.
- Some barracks do not meet DOD standards for privacy and configuration, such as minimum number of bedrooms, in part because the military services' guidance for privacy and configuration do not reflect DOD standards.
- DOD does not provide sufficient oversight of housing programs for barracks, such as through appropriate guidance or direction to the military services on tracking, assessing, and remediating deficiencies in barracks conditions.

GAO's work similarly shows that DOD needs to continue to improve privatized military housing, which includes about 200,000 homes for service members and their families in the United States. Around 2018, reports of lead-based paint and other hazards, such as pest infestation, raised questions about DOD's management of privatized housing. In March 2020, GAO made several recommendations to improve DOD oversight, and DOD has taken steps to implement them. However, in April 2023, GAO reported that gaps remain in DOD's efforts. For example, GAO found that DOD had not (1) set clear and consistent inspection standards for homes undergoing change of occupancy or (2) provided adequate guidance or training to officials on assisting residents in using a new formal dispute resolution process.

Improved oversight and addressing GAO's recommendations would position DOD to improve the quality of living conditions for its service members.