

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-105549](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

The PSOB program supports public safety officers killed or disabled in the line of duty by providing them or their families death, disability, and education benefits. Statutory changes have expanded eligibility leading, in part, to a near doubling to about 900 claims annually between fiscal years 2020 and 2023. PSOB has cooperative agreements with two nonprofit organizations to assist with program outreach and claims assistance.

GAO was asked to review PSOB's program management and its efforts to raise program awareness and assist claimants. This report examines PSOB's: (1) implementation of recent statutory changes; (2) efforts to increase program awareness and assist claimants; and (3) adherence to leading practices. In response to a statutory provision, GAO also reviewed PSOB claim data for post-traumatic stress disorder and related suicide claims.

GAO reviewed statutory amendments to the program since 2017 and agency documentation. Additionally, GAO interviewed agency officials and representatives from PSOB's two cooperative partners and nine public safety organizations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations for PSOB to improve the quality and timeliness of its public reports, evaluate current outreach and claims assistance efforts, implement a comprehensive performance management system, and fully document procedures. The agency concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-24-105549](#). For more information, contact Thomas Costa at (202) 512-4769 or costat@gao.gov.

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PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS' BENEFITS PROGRAM

Transparency, Claims Assistance, and Program Management Improvements Needed

What GAO Found

Officials reported taking actions to implement four changes to the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) program that were enacted from 2017 through 2022; but PSOB did not meet all public reporting requirements. PSOB officials reported implementing the changes by assessing claims to determine their applicability, providing staff training, and conducting public outreach. However, in reporting, PSOB consistently omitted the total number of claims pending for more than one year, although required. It also frequently did not meet mandated reporting timelines (see figure). PSOB officials said reports were late, in part, because they reassigned staff to prioritize claims determinations over timely reporting.

Percent of Reports Posted Later than Required by the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Improvement Act of 2017, October 2017-December 2023

	30–59 days late	60–89 days late	90–119 days late	120 or more days late
180-day reports	38%	23%	8%	31%
Weekly reports	On time	1–13 days late	14–27 days late	4 or more weeks late
	11%	66%	13%	10%

Percentage of reports

Source: GAO analysis of Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) data. | GAO-24-105549

Note: The Public Safety Officers' Benefits Improvement Act of 2017 required PSOB to publicly report specific measures not less than once per week and, separately, not less than once every 180 days.

Outreach by PSOB and its cooperative partners consists of presenting at conferences, conducting trainings to public safety agencies, and providing claims assistance. But several stakeholders told GAO that the program was not well known among public safety agencies and officers, with one stakeholder estimating that up to two-thirds of public safety agencies are unaware of PSOB or its benefits. Because PSOB does not target outreach to those disabled in the line of duty or measure awareness among potential applicants, it cannot assess the effectiveness of its outreach efforts. Further, PSOB's claims assistance efforts do not provide applicants enough information, such as about missing documentation, to track and complete their claims. Evaluating its claims assistance efforts would better position PSOB to assist applicants in compiling complete applications.

PSOB has not established a comprehensive performance management system with goals, quality data, and monitoring, nor has it fully documented procedures for effective performance management. For example, PSOB has not established long-term goals to determine what the program is trying to achieve. Also, the claims data PSOB collects may not be sufficiently reliable to evaluate PSOB's performance due to inconsistent data, among other things. Further, PSOB does not fully document its operational policies and procedures. Implementing a performance management system with goals, quality data, a monitoring process, and fully documented procedures will better position PSOB to manage its program and provide claims assistance to an increasing number of applicants.