Why This Matters

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has primary responsibility for securing the 4,000-mile border between the United States and Canada. Border Patrol, within CBP, reported that apprehensions in this region more than tripled from fiscal year 2019 through fiscal year 2024. As we reported in 2024, the agency has not met agent staffing targets in recent years.
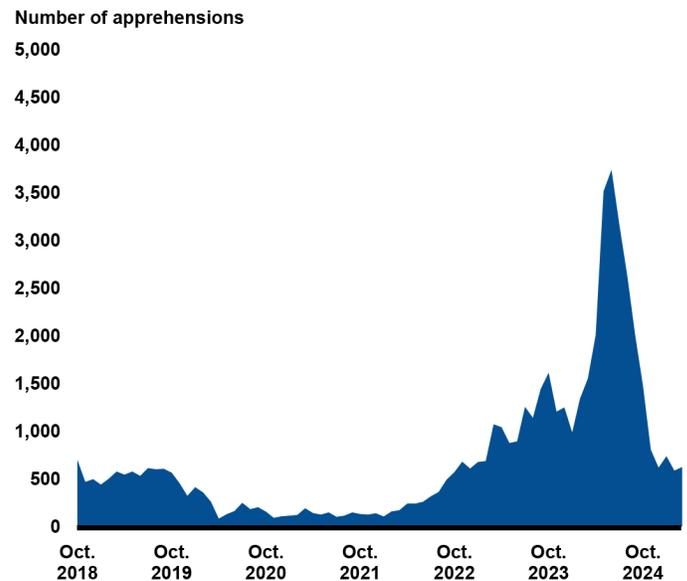
GAO Key Takeaways

Border Patrol's efforts to secure our nation's borders include apprehending people suspected of illicit activity such as entry without inspection and drug smuggling.

Apprehensions and drug seizures. From fiscal year 2023 to 2024, the number of people Border Patrol apprehended along the northern border increased sharply (see fig.). From fiscal year 2019 through fiscal year 2024, the number of Border Patrol's drug seizures in this region varied.

Technology. CBP uses aircraft, vessels, and surveillance technology—such as cameras, radar sites, and sensors—as part of its efforts to secure the northern border. From fiscal year 2019 through fiscal year 2024, CBP's deployment of this technology increased.

Staffing. In this same 5-year period, the number of agents staffed along the northern border decreased, but CBP has initiatives underway to address this issue. In addition, there was a decrease in the staffing rate for Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialists who monitor surveillance technology. The staffing rate for this key position along the northern border has been below its target, and the agency does not have a plan with strategies to address the staffing gap. Developing such a plan could help Border Patrol better carry out its responsibility to secure the northern border.

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Border Patrol Apprehensions Along the Northern Border from Fiscal Year 2019 Through the First Half of Fiscal Year 2025

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Border Patrol data. | GAO-26-107501

How GAO Did This Study

We analyzed Border Patrol data on apprehensions and drug seizures, as well as CBP data on staffing and resources since fiscal year 2019. We visited six CBP units along the northern border, selected based on apprehension levels, among other factors. We also interviewed CBP officials from the other units along the northern border.

What GAO Recommends

We recommend that CBP develop and implement a plan with strategies to address workforce gaps in the Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialist position. DHS concurred with the recommendation.

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