



## Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on  
Transportation and Maritime Security,  
Committee on Homeland Security,  
House of Representatives

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# COAST GUARD

## Actions Needed to Address Challenges that Hinder Maritime Security Operations

Statement of Heather MacLeod, Director,  
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## Actions Needed to Address Challenges that Hinder Maritime Security Operations

GAO-26-108901

February 2026

A testimony before the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

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### What GAO Found

In prior work, GAO identified challenges that have hindered the Coast Guard's ability to meet its maritime security operation demands. GAO made the following recommendations to help address challenges pertaining to the Coast Guard's workforce and assets, which it has yet to fully address.

- **Workforce.** In November 2019, GAO found that the Coast Guard lacked assurance that it had the right mix of deployable specialized forces personnel—who have capabilities needed to combat maritime threats—in the right units. GAO made two recommendations to address these issues. Further, in April 2025, GAO reported that even with increased recruiting, the service was approximately 2,600 service members (8.5 percent) short of its enlisted workforce target at the end of fiscal year 2024. GAO recommended that the service develop a plan to support its workforce retention.
- **Vessels and aircraft.** In June 2025 GAO found that the Medium Endurance Cutter's availability to conduct missions declined from fiscal year 2020 through fiscal year 2024 due, in part, to maintenance challenges that limit its maritime security operations. This is exacerbated by persistent and longstanding challenges managing its planned \$40 billion acquisition programs to modernize vessels and aircraft. In November 2025, GAO found that continued delays and cost overruns with the Offshore Patrol Cutter program—a high priority acquisition—are likely because of outdated cost estimates and incomplete ship design. GAO made nine recommendations to address these issues, including that Coast Guard stabilize design before constructing more ships.

#### Coast Guard Deployable Specialized Forces Conducting Drug Interdiction Mission



Source: U.S. Coast Guard. | GAO-26-108901

### Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. government has identified transnational and domestic criminal organizations as a significant threat to the public, law enforcement, and national security.

The Coast Guard is a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and is the nation's lead federal maritime law enforcement agency. It received nearly \$25 billion in supplemental funding in fiscal year 2025 for various acquisitions and in support of efforts to modernize operations and capabilities. It conducts maritime security operations, including law enforcement boardings, drug interdiction, and other missions. The Coast Guard employs personnel and assets—including aircraft and vessels—to conduct maritime security operations.

This statement discusses Coast Guard challenges GAO previously identified related to its maritime security operations and actions to help address these challenges. This statement is based primarily on seven GAO reports published from November 2019 to January 2026.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO previously made 26 recommendations to the Coast Guard in the reports covered by this statement to help address challenges related to staffing, vessels, and aircraft, as well as acquisition delays and cost overruns.

DHS generally agreed with the recommendations. As of January 2026, four of the recommendations have been implemented. GAO continues to monitor the agency's progress in implementing the remaining recommendations.

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Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member McIver, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss GAO's work examining Coast Guard maritime security operations and challenges. The U.S. government has identified transnational and domestic criminal organizations as a significant threat to the public, law enforcement, and national security. The Coast Guard—a multi-mission, maritime military service within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—is the nation's lead federal maritime law enforcement agency. To help carry out certain maritime security missions, the Coast Guard maintains Deployable Specialized Forces (Specialized Forces) units with the capabilities needed to handle drug interdiction, terrorism, and other threats to the U.S. maritime environment.<sup>1</sup> These units deploy from their home locations, such as major U.S. port areas, to conduct operations in U.S. coastal waters and internationally. Certain units can carry out operations from vessels, such as Coast Guard cutters and Navy ships, or air assets, such as Coast Guard helicopters.

According to the Coast Guard, its presence—vessels, aircraft, and Specialized Forces—serves as an enforcement mechanism and deterrent to illicit activity that contributes to instability throughout the Western Hemisphere. Figure 1 shows Coast Guard personnel conducting a drug interdiction operation that included a Specialized Forces member boarding a foreign, semi-submersible vessel, which resulted in seizing 17,000 pounds of cocaine.

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<sup>1</sup>See 6 U.S.C. § 468(a) (Coast Guard missions).

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**Figure 1: Coast Guard Specialized Forces Personnel Conducting a Drug Interdiction Operation**



Source: U.S. Coast Guard. | GAO-26-108901

My statement today discusses challenges the Coast Guard faces related to its maritime security operations and actions that could help address those challenges. This statement is based primarily on seven GAO reports published from November 2019 to January 2026.

For the reports we cite in this statement, among other methodologies, we analyzed Coast Guard policies, documentation, and data, and interviewed officials from agency headquarters and selected field units. More detailed information on our scope and methodology, including analyzing data and determining a sufficient level of reliability for our reporting, can be found in the reports we cite in this statement. For this statement, we also reviewed information on the status of agency implementation of selected recommendations through January 2026. (See appendix I for related open recommendations as of January 2026.)

We conducted the work on which this statement is based 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

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provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Several Challenges Hinder Coast Guard Efforts to Conduct Its Maritime Security Operations, which the Service Has Yet to Fully Address

Our prior work has identified several longstanding challenges that have hindered the Coast Guard's ability to meet its mission demands, including those conducted by Specialized Forces. These include: (1) staffing shortfalls and workforce planning, (2) availability of vessels and aircraft, and (3) acquisition of new assets.<sup>2</sup> The Coast Guard received nearly \$25 billion in supplemental funding in fiscal year 2025 for various acquisitions and in support of efforts to modernize operations and capabilities and faces the difficult decision of determining how best to invest these resources.<sup>3</sup> We have made recommendations to help the Coast Guard address these challenges and effectively and efficiently use its resources.

### Staffing Shortfalls and Workforce Planning

Our prior work has shown that staffing shortfalls and poor workforce planning have affected the Coast Guard's ability to meet its mission needs, including for maritime security missions that Specialized Forces support. While the service recruited more enlisted service members than it lost in fiscal year 2024, it experienced net enlisted staffing losses from fiscal year 2019 through fiscal year 2023. In April 2025, we reported that even with the increase in recruiting, the service remained approximately 2,600 service members, or 8.5 percent of its total enlisted workforce, short of its enlisted workforce target at the end of fiscal year 2024.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the Coast Guard was operating below the workforce level it deemed necessary to meet its operational demands. We made three recommendations, including that the Coast Guard develop a clear plan to support its retention initiatives. The Coast Guard agreed with our recommendations, and we continue to monitor their implementation.

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<sup>2</sup>GAO, *Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Address Persistent Challenges Hindering Efforts to Counter Illicit Maritime Drug Smuggling*, [GAO-24-107785](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 19, 2024). GAO, *Offshore Patrol Cutter: Coast Guard Should Gain Key Knowledge Before Buying More Ships*, [GAO-26-107583](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 25, 2025).

<sup>3</sup>Pub. L. No. 119-21, tit. IV, § 40001, 139 Stat. 72, 127 (2025). These funds are available for obligation through fiscal year 2029.

<sup>4</sup>GAO, *Coast Guard: Enhanced Data and Planning Could Help Address Service Member Retention Issues*, [GAO-25-107869](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 23, 2025).

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Specific to Specialized Forces, in November 2019 we reported that the Coast Guard had taken steps to improve retention of these personnel.<sup>5</sup> Prior to a 2007 reorganization, active-duty Coast Guard personnel working in Specialized Forces units could not remain in those units and be competitive for promotions, according to Coast Guard officials we interviewed for that review. Officials told us that this was because the Coast Guard has certain requirements for career progression, including personnel working in various assignments within a given career path. After the reorganization, the Coast Guard created a maritime law enforcement career path within Specialized Forces in response to challenges the service faced in retaining law enforcement personnel. Coast Guard officials we spoke with told us that the career path has helped them retain qualified Specialized Forces personnel. According to the Coast Guard's Force Design 2028 plan, retention of Specialized Forces remains a priority.<sup>6</sup>

Further, we have previously reported that the Coast Guard might not have the right mix and number of personnel relative to the mix and number of operations where Specialized Forces are needed to meet mission demands. For example, in November 2019 we reported that officials from some Specialized Forces units we interviewed indicated that they experienced periods of underutilization.<sup>7</sup> An official at one unit described efforts to increase the number of operations the unit conducted by asking other Coast Guard units to request them for specialized assistance. Officials at another unit conducted similar outreach, including passing out flyers describing Specialized Forces capabilities and contact information should the other Coast Guard units need assistance. In contrast, similar units turned down operations because of a lack of available personnel. For example, officials from a different Specialized Forces unit described instances where they had to decline operations because they did not have enough personnel to meet the demand.

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<sup>5</sup>GAO, *Coast Guard: Assessing Deployable Specialized Forces' Workforce Needs Could Improve Efficiency and Reduce Potential Overlap or Gaps in Capabilities*, [GAO-20-33](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 21, 2019).

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Coast Guard, *Force Design 2028 Execution Plan Summary* (July 2025). Force Design 2028 is a U.S. Coast Guard strategic initiative aimed at modernizing the service into a more agile, capable, and responsive maritime force to meet evolving operational demands by 2028. It focuses on four key areas—People, Organization, Technology, and Contracting/Acquisition.

<sup>7</sup>[GAO-20-33](#).



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As a result, we made two recommendations. We recommended that the Coast Guard conduct a comprehensive analysis of its Specialized Forces' workforce needs and that it assess the extent to which unnecessary overlap or duplication exist. We reported that without an analysis of the Specialized Forces units as a whole, the Coast Guard did not have reasonable assurance that it has the requisite number of personnel in the right units to conduct the required missions. While the Coast Guard agreed with the recommendation to conduct a comprehensive analysis of its workforce, it did not agree to assess the extent to which unnecessary overlap or duplication exists. Nevertheless, the Coast Guard contracted a study in 2022 to conduct an analysis of Specialized Forces' ports, waterways, and coastal security mission. This addressed both of our recommendations by providing the service with better information for that mission priority.<sup>8</sup> However, in November 2024 the Coast Guard acknowledged that its study did not address all missions or Specialized Forces units, and that significant overlap in mission and mission capabilities exist. Such continued analysis remains important, particularly as the Coast Guard moves to establish a Deployable Specialized Forces Command to optimize Specialized Forces' unique capabilities as part of Force Design 2028.

Regarding Specialized Forces' deployment with Coast Guard cutters and helicopters, we have also identified gaps in cutter and aircraft workforce planning. Figure 2 shows Specialized Forces conducting vertical deployment training from a Coast Guard helicopter.

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<sup>8</sup>RAND Corporation, *Mission Analysis of U.S. Coast Guard Deployable Specialized Forces* (Dec. 2022).

**Figure 2: Coast Guard Specialized Forces Conduct Vertical Deployment Training in Florida, September 2025**



Source: U.S. Coast Guard. | GAO-26-108901



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In June 2025, we reported that cutters often deploy without a full crew due to personnel shortages.<sup>9</sup> We recommended that the Coast Guard collect and assess data on staff availability for the cutter workforce. DHS did not agree with this recommendation, but we maintain that it remains valid and could help ensure the Coast Guard is fully considering the workload faced by cutter crews and support personnel when making decisions on personnel assignments. We also previously reported on Coast Guard resource shortfalls and incomplete workforce planning for its aviation workforce. As a result, we recommended that the Coast Guard assess and determine the aviation workforce levels it requires to meet its mission needs. DHS concurred with this recommendation and stated that the Coast Guard would conduct workforce analyses for its air stations by June 2026.<sup>10</sup> Until such analysis is completed, the Coast Guard will not fully understand the resources it requires for its aviation units.

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## Vessel and Aircraft Availability

The Coast Guard's vessels and aircraft have faced availability challenges and have been in a state of decline for decades, which can limit the ability of Specialized Forces to conduct their missions.<sup>11</sup> Overall, the total number of operational hours generally decreased, and the total estimated operating expenses generally increased from fiscal year 2017 through fiscal year 2024, as shown in figure 3.

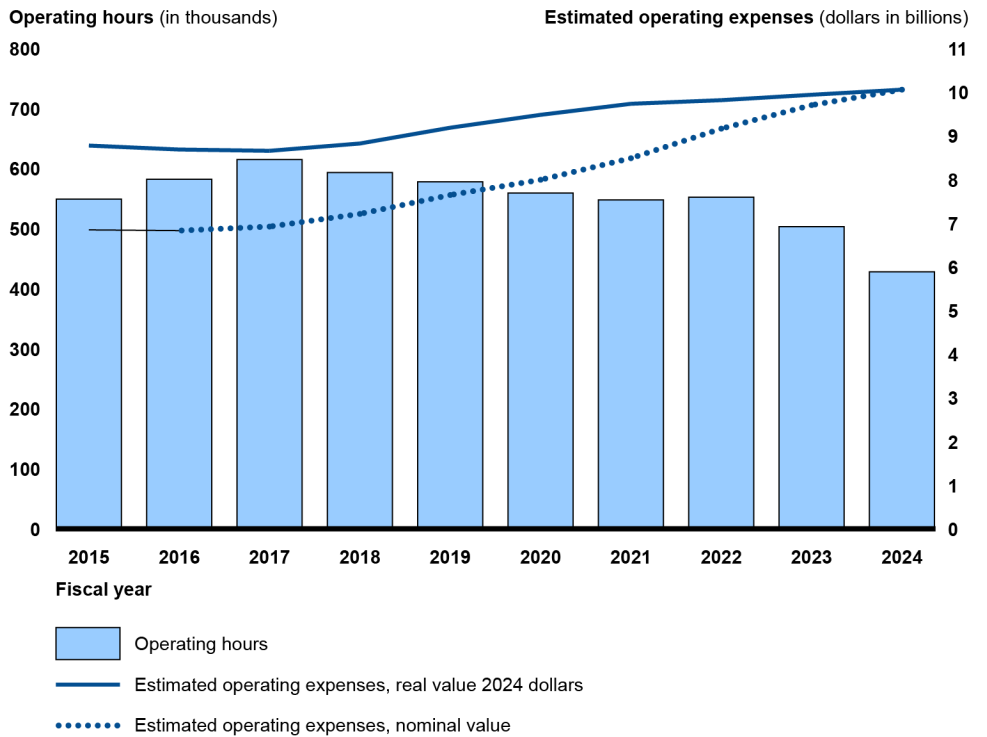
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<sup>9</sup>See GAO, *Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Address Cutter and Maintenance Workforce Challenges*, [GAO-25-107222](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jun. 25, 2025). Specifically, our analysis showed that 1,104 cutter crew and support positions were vacant (about 13 percent) in fiscal year 2024. This is an increase from fiscal year 2017, in which 401 cutter crew and support positions were vacant (about 5 percent).

<sup>10</sup>GAO, *Coast Guard: Aircraft Fleet and Aviation Workforce Assessments Needed*, [GAO-24-106374](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 9, 2024). The Coast Guard agreed with our recommendation. We also made four other recommendations in the report and the Coast Guard concurred with all four. As of August 2025, four of the five recommendations remain open. We will continue monitoring Coast Guard's efforts to address these recommendations.

<sup>11</sup>Vessel and aircraft availability challenges hinder the Coast Guard's ability to meet mission demands. For example, in January 2026, we reported that during fiscal years 2015 through 2024, the Coast Guard generally did not meet its drug or migrant interdiction goals. We also found that the service did not fully share information about lessons learned from maritime migrant interdiction with federal partners. We made two recommendations to DHS to address these issues and will monitor Coast Guard actions to fully address them. See, GAO, *Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Improve Maritime Interdictions*, [GAO-26-107440](#). (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 13, 2026).

**Figure 3: Coast Guard Vessel and Aircraft Operational Hours and Estimated Operating Expenses, Fiscal Year 2015 through Fiscal Year 2024**



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard data. | GAO-26-108901

Note: Coast Guard operational hours include the use of aircraft, cutters, and boats for its 11 statutory missions. See 6 U.S.C. § 468(a). They do not include the time personnel may spend on missions without using vessels or aircraft. We do not include hours expended for support activities or for training. According to the Coast Guard, the service estimates its operating expenses for each mission by (1) multiplying operations and maintenance costs for supporting a vessel or aircraft by the operational hours and (2) using survey data to estimate additional personnel costs for nonvessel or aircraft-based operations.

In June 2025, we reported that the operational availability of the Coast Guard’s Medium Endurance Cutters, which the Coast Guard relies on for its law enforcement missions, declined from fiscal year 2020 through fiscal year 2024.<sup>12</sup> We also reported that the Coast Guard was experiencing increasing cutter maintenance challenges, and that those increasing challenges, such as equipment failure and resulting unplanned maintenance, have led to cutters missing patrol obligations. For example, Coast Guard operational reporting documents indicated that unplanned maintenance, among other things, had significantly reduced the capacity

<sup>12</sup>[GAO-25-107222](#).

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of Medium Endurance Cutters to conduct missions. Further, due to delays in receiving critical parts needed for repairs, the Coast Guard cannibalized cutters by moving working parts between cutters. According to Coast Guard data, there were 194 cannibalizations completed across the cutter fleet from February 2022 to September 2024; 145 of these involved National Security Cutters—which mostly support the drug interdiction mission.

As a result, in June 2025 we made five recommendations to address cutter maintenance and workforce challenges. For example, we recommended that the Coast Guard systematically collect and assess data on instances where previously deferred maintenance may have caused cutter equipment failures and develop mitigation strategies as appropriate. DHS agreed with this recommendation and described steps the Coast Guard plans to take to improve its processes to document, develop, and validate the efficacy of a new cutter maintenance metric, which it plans to use to develop the recommended assessment. DHS estimates completing these efforts by June 2027. We will continue to monitor the status of this and the other recommendations.

The Coast Guard's asset readiness challenges are not limited to its cutters. In April 2024, we reported that the Coast Guard's aircraft generally did not meet its 71 percent availability target during fiscal year 2018 through fiscal year 2022.<sup>13</sup> Coast Guard officials attributed the aircraft fleet generally not meeting availability targets to maintenance and repair challenges. As a result, we made five recommendations, including that the Coast Guard assess the type and number of helicopters, and aviation workforce size, needed to meet its mission demands. In response, in August 2025, the Coast Guard told us an analysis of alternatives and a fleet mix analysis are being ordered. It anticipates completing these steps by December 2027. We will continue monitoring Coast Guard's efforts to address these recommendations, as well as the

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<sup>13</sup>[GAO-24-106374](#). We further reported that the Coast Guard was embarking on a significant operational change from a largely short-range helicopter fleet to a medium-range fleet. However, we reported that its related planning efforts raised serious questions, including how the medium-range helicopters will interact with cutters for its drug interdiction operations.

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other recommendation that remains unaddressed.<sup>14</sup> See appendix 1 for more information on open GAO recommendations to DHS pertaining to Coast Guard personnel and assets, as of January 2026.

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## Acquisition Programs

We have previously reported that the Coast Guard's declining asset availability is exacerbated by persistent challenges it faces managing its planned \$40 billion acquisition programs to modernize its vessels and aircraft. For example, in September 2024 we reported on the declining availability of the Coast Guard aircraft fleet and found that the Coast Guard's cutter program faces persistent challenges including capability gaps from schedule delays.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, officials told us that they would not be able to increase mission activity without acquiring more assets, but acquisition delays have been a longstanding challenge for the service. Furthermore, according to officials, the acquisition process is lengthy, as it can take several years from initial request to final delivery of an asset.<sup>16</sup>

One of the Coast Guard's highest priority programs—the Offshore Patrol Cutter—has experienced delays that will exacerbate maritime capability gaps.<sup>17</sup> According to the Coast Guard, it urgently needs Offshore Patrol Cutters to replace aging cutters that conduct law enforcement and search

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<sup>14</sup>The Coast Guard has addressed one of the five recommendations. In April 2024, we found that the Coast Guard's air stations do not have complete data for the Coast Guard to assess service-wide readiness. We recommended that the Coast Guard should establish procedures to uniformly collect and maintain air station readiness data. The Coast Guard concurred with this recommendation and in April 2025 updated its operational reporting manual to, among other things, help standardize the collection of air station readiness data. The manual requires air stations to report periods when they cannot meet readiness requirements and provides examples on how to do so. By issuing updated guidance requiring air stations to uniformly collect and maintain aircraft readiness data, the Coast Guard can help ensure it has complete and accurate information on Coast Guard-wide air station readiness.

<sup>15</sup>[GAO-24-107785](#).

<sup>16</sup>[GAO-26-107440](#).

<sup>17</sup>In June 2023, we found that the Coast Guard's management of its Offshore Patrol Cutter acquisitions continued to face challenges we had previously identified. We made five recommendations to the Coast Guard, including that it develop a technology maturation plan and update its acquisition policy to require programs to complete routing of distributive systems as part of functional design prior to lead ship construction. Two of the recommendations have not yet been fully addressed. See, GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Offshore Patrol Cutter Program Needs to Mature Technology and Design*, [GAO-23-105805](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jun. 20, 2023).

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and rescue operations.<sup>18</sup> However, in November 2025, we reported that the Coast Guard’s plan to acquire 25 Offshore Patrol Cutters was delayed by more than 5 years.<sup>19</sup> Notwithstanding delays, ship design remains incomplete, and continued delays and cost overruns are likely.<sup>20</sup>

As a result, we made four recommendations in November 2025, including that the program stabilizes design before starting construction of additional ships. Incorporating the knowledge gained from testing—as well as other shipbuilding leading practices—into the procurement process could help the Coast Guard make better investment decisions. It could also improve the timeliness of future ship deliveries. While the agency agreed with two of the four recommendations, we maintain that all four recommendations are warranted and will continue to monitor their implementation.

In summary, the Coast Guard’s Specialized Forces units include a range of specialized capabilities that are vital to the service’s ability to fulfill its missions, including those pertaining to maritime security operations. The Coast Guard received nearly \$25 billion in supplemental funding in fiscal year 2025 for various acquisitions and in support of efforts to modernize operations and capabilities and faces the difficult decision of determining how best to invest these resources.<sup>21</sup> We have identified longstanding challenges with the Coast Guard’s management of its programs and tradeoff decisions among its mission priorities and have made recommendations to help address these challenges. Addressing our 20 open recommendations pertaining to the Coast Guard’s workforce and assets would help ensure that the service efficiently uses its resources to

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<sup>18</sup>Admiral Linda L. Fagan, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard, testimony before the House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., July 24, 2024.

<sup>19</sup>[GAO-26-107583](#). We also reported that the program is at risk of not meeting its cost goals, in part, because the program used outdated cost information to establish them.

<sup>20</sup>The Coast Guard plans to acquire the 25 Offshore Patrol Cutters in four phases. In July 2025, the Coast Guard terminated two of four ships from the first phase contract for default.

<sup>21</sup>Pub. L. No. 119-21, tit. IV, § 40001, 139 Stat. 72, 127 (2025). These funds are available for obligation through fiscal year 2029.



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carry out its maritime security operations—including those carried out by Specialized Forces—and support national interests.<sup>22</sup>

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Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member McIver, and Members of the Subcommittee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

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## GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

If you or your staff have any questions about this testimony, please contact Heather MacLeod, Director, Homeland Security and Justice, at [MacLeodH@gao.gov](mailto:MacLeodH@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. GAO staff who made key contributions to this statement are Andrew Curry (Assistant Director), Giff Howland (Analyst-in-Charge), Paul Hobart, Jay Berman, Mary E. Offutt-Reagin, and Schuyler Janzen. Other staff who made key contributions to the reports cited in the testimony are identified in the source products.

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<sup>22</sup>We made 26 recommendations in the reports covered by this statement. The Coast Guard implemented four of these recommendations, twenty remain open, and two were closed as no longer valid.

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# Appendix I Related Open Recommendations to the Department of Homeland Security as of January 2026

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*Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Improve Maritime Interdictions.* [GAO-26-107440](#). Washington, D.C.: January 13, 2026.

- **Recommendation:** The Secretary of Homeland Security should ensure the Commandant of the Coast Guard implements performance measures for the migrant interdiction mission that effectively measure the service's efforts.
- **Recommendation:** The Secretary of Homeland Security should ensure the Operation Vigilant Sentry task force implements a process to identify and address lessons learned following real-world events and exercises with all relevant federal partner agencies, and shares relevant information with those partners.

*Offshore Patrol Cutter: Coast Guard Should Gain Key Knowledge Before Buying More Ships.* [GAO-26-107583](#). Washington, D.C.: November 25, 2025.

- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that the Offshore Patrol Cutter (OPC) program demonstrates that the stage 2 design is stable prior to authorizing construction of additional stage 2 OPCs by (1) completing basic and functional design, including routing of major distributive systems that affect multiple zones of the ship, in a 3D model with reliable vendor-furnished information and (2) successfully testing an integrated prototype of the davit in a realistic environment, consistent with shipbuilding leading practices.
- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard, in collaboration with the Navy, should develop a memorandum of agreement to clarify and document agreement on how the evaluation of deficiencies and ongoing surveillance of Austal's EVM system will be coordinated between the Coast Guard and SUPSHIP throughout the duration of the OPC program.
- **Recommendation:** The DHS Secretary should ensure that the DHS Under Secretary for Management directs the Coast Guard to revise the OPC acquisition program baseline to include cost goals for each stage.
- **Recommendation:** The DHS Secretary should ensure that the DHS Under Secretary for Management directs the Coast Guard to document a plan for acquiring stage 3 OPCs that identifies (1) how results from operational testing of OPC stages 1 and 2 will be incorporated into stage 3 procurement activities, such as developing the request for proposals, and contingency plans if this testing is

delayed; and (2) how leading practices for ship design will be incorporated into stage 3.

*Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Address Cutter Maintenance and Workforce Challenges.* [GAO-25-107222](#). Washington, D.C.: June 25, 2025.

- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should systematically collect and assess data on instances where previously deferred maintenance may have caused cutter equipment failures and develop mitigation strategies as appropriate.
- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should complete Ship Structure and Machinery Evaluation Boards for all cutter types at the intervals prescribed by policy.
- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should systematically collect and assess data on which parts and systems across the cutter fleet are or will become obsolete and develop mitigation strategies as appropriate.
- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should systematically collect and assess data on cutter days lost due to unplanned maintenance issues.
- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should regularly collect and analyze data on staff availability for cutter crew and support personnel positions, including which cutter workforce positions are temporarily empty across the cutter fleet, and use this information to inform personnel assignments.

*Coast Guard: Enhanced Data and Planning Could Help Address Service Member Retention Issues.* [GAO-25-107869](#). Washington, D.C.: April 23, 2025.

- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that the Office of Workforce Requirements, Systems, and Analytics implements additional mechanisms to increase response rates for its Career Intention Survey.
- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that the Office of Workforce Requirements, Systems, and Analytics analyzes the potential for nonresponse bias in its Career Intention Survey results.
- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that the Talent Management Transformation Program Integration Office develops a clear plan, including how retention

initiatives align with strategic objectives and time frames and milestones for implementation, to track progress and gauge program performance.

*Coast Guard: Aircraft Fleet and Aviation Workforce Assessments Needed.* [GAO-24-106374](#). Washington, D.C.: April 9, 2024.

- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should establish a process to regularly evaluate Coast Guard-wide air station readiness data.
- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should assess the type of helicopters the Coast Guard requires to meet its mission demands, as part of an analysis of alternatives.
- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should assess the number of helicopters the Coast Guard requires to meet its mission demands, as part of a fleet mix analysis.
- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should assess and determine the aviation workforce levels it requires to meet its mission needs.

*Coast Guard Acquisitions: Offshore Patrol Cutter Program Needs to Mature Technology and Design.* [GAO-23-105805](#). Washington, D.C.: June 20, 2023.

- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that OPC program officials develop a technology maturation plan for the davit prior to builder's trials. This plan should identify potential courses of action to address davit technical immaturity, including assessing technology alternatives should the current davit continue to face development challenges, and a date by which the Coast Guard will make a go/no-go decision to pursue such a technology alternative.
- **Recommendation:** The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that OPC program officials test an integrated prototype of the davit in a realistic environment prior to stage 1 builder's trials.

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# Related GAO Products

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*Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Improve Maritime Interdictions.* [GAO-26-107440](#). Washington, D.C.: January 13, 2026.

*Offshore Patrol Cutter: Coast Guard Should Gain Key Knowledge Before Buying More Ships.* [GAO-26-107583](#). Washington, D.C.: November 25, 2025.

*Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Address Cutter Maintenance and Workforce Challenges.* [GAO-25-107222](#). Washington, D.C.: June 25, 2025.

*Coast Guard: Enhanced Data and Planning Could Help Address Service Member Retention Issues.* [GAO-25-107869](#). Washington, D.C.: April 23, 2025.

*Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Address Persistent Challenges Hindering Efforts to Counter Illicit Maritime Drug Smuggling.* [GAO-24-107785](#). Washington, D.C.: September 19, 2024.

*Coast Guard: Aircraft Fleet and Aviation Workforce Assessments Needed.* [GAO-24-106374](#). Washington, D.C.: April 9, 2024.

*Coast Guard Acquisitions: Offshore Patrol Cutter Program Needs to Mature Technology and Design.* [GAO-23-105805](#). Washington, D.C.: June 20, 2023.

*Coast Guard: Assessing Deployable Specialized Forces' Workforce Needs Could Improve Efficiency and Reduce Potential Overlap or Gaps in Capabilities.* [GAO-20-33](#). Washington, D.C.: November 21, 2019



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Website: <https://www.gao.gov/about/what-gao-does/fraudnet>

Automated answering system: (800) 424-5454

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## Media Relations

Sarah Kaczmarek, Managing Director, [Media@gao.gov](mailto:Media@gao.gov)

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## Congressional Relations

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## General Inquiries

<https://www.gao.gov/about/contact-us>



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