

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105001](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

On January 6, 2021, thousands of demonstrators surrounded the U.S. Capitol Building. Demonstrators attacked and injured law enforcement officers and eventually breached the building. The Capitol Police is responsible for protecting the Congress, its Members, staff, visitors, and facilities. The Capitol Police Board oversees the Capitol Police.

GAO was asked to review the Capitol Police's physical security efforts for January 6. This report addresses the Capitol Police and the Board's: (1) physical security planning for January 6; (2) response to that day's events, including the procedures for obtaining outside assistance; and (3) process for assessing and mitigating physical security risks.

GAO reviewed Capitol Police plans, procedures, hearing statements, timelines, and other documents related to the planning and response on January 6 and how the Capitol Police assesses security risks. GAO also interviewed officials from the Capitol Police Board, the Capitol Police, the Architect of the Capitol, and other federal, state, and local agencies.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to the Capitol Police Board and the Capitol Police, including finalizing and documenting procedures for obtaining outside assistance in an emergency, addressing security risks, and considering security recommendations. The Capitol Police Board did not take a position on GAO's recommendations. The Capitol Police agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-22-105001](#). For more information, contact Catina Latham at (202) 512-2834 or [LathamC@gao.gov](mailto:LathamC@gao.gov).

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## CAPITOL ATTACK

### The Capitol Police Need Clearer Emergency Procedures and a Comprehensive Security Risk Assessment Process

## What GAO Found

The U.S. Capitol Police's (Capitol Police) planning for January 6, 2021, did not reflect the potential for extreme violence aimed at the Capitol and did not include contingencies for support from other agencies. For example, although the Capitol Police had information protesters could be armed and were planning to target Congress, the Capitol Police's plans focused on a manageable, largely non-violent protest at the Capitol. The Capitol Police's Office of Inspector General previously recommended that the Capitol Police improve its operational planning.

## Images of the Capitol Attack on January 6, 2021



Source: U.S. Capitol Police. | GAO-22-105001

On January 6, the Capitol Police and the Capitol Police Board, which oversees the Capitol Police, used various different authorities to obtain assistance from about 2,000 personnel from outside agencies. However, the Capitol Police and the Board lacked clear, detailed procedures to guide their decisions about which authority to use or the steps to follow in obtaining assistance. For example, neither the Capitol Police nor the Board had procedures in place describing whether or when approval from congressional leadership was needed for the use of outside assistance during an emergency. The Capitol Police and the Board are currently developing documented procedures, but they are not yet final. Without such procedures, the Capitol Police and the Board may be hampered in their ability to request aid quickly and effectively in future emergencies.

The Capitol Police's process for assessing and mitigating physical security risks to the Capitol complex is not comprehensive or documented. Also, how the Capitol Police Board considers and decides which physical security recommendations made by the Capitol Police should be implemented is unclear. Federal guidance is available to help agencies develop comprehensive processes for assessing physical security risks to facilities. Capitol Police officials stated that they have been informally applying this guidance for the past 5 to 7 years. While the Capitol Police's process incorporates parts of the guidance, its process is not as comprehensive or well documented as the guidance outlines. For example, the Capitol Police conducts regular security assessments of the Capitol complex and buildings, but it does so without a documented procedure to ensure completeness and consistency. In addition, while the Capitol Police makes security recommendations, it does not have the authority to implement them. The Capitol Police Board does not have a process for formally considering or making decisions on the recommendations. Without a comprehensive, documented process to assess and mitigate risks, there is no assurance that the Capitol Police and the Board are not overlooking potential security risks.