

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105859](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Driving while impaired by substances such as alcohol, prescription and over-the-counter medicines, or illicit drugs remains a persistent traffic safety and public health issue. Identifying repeat offenders can help criminal justice agencies take measures to reduce impaired driving, such as imposing escalating penalties for repeat offenses and better targeting programs to reduce recidivism. States have persistently reported large amounts of incomplete criminal history information used for this purpose.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act included a provision for GAO to study issues related to the reporting and interstate sharing of data on impaired-driving offenses. This report describes (1) how states report impaired-driving information to federal databases; (2) the challenges that selected states face in collecting impaired-driving information and reporting it to federal databases; and (3) how selected states have used federal resources to address challenges to collecting impaired-driving information.

GAO reviewed applicable statutes and regulations, and analyzed DOJ-funded survey data on the criminal history information states collect. GAO selected a non-generalizable sample of 12 states to serve as illustrative examples, based on the percentage of fatal car crashes in the states that involved an alcohol-impaired driver, among other factors. GAO also interviewed federal, state, and local officials, as well as non-governmental stakeholders.

View [GAO-23-105859](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth Repko at (202) 512-2834 or RepkoE@gao.gov.

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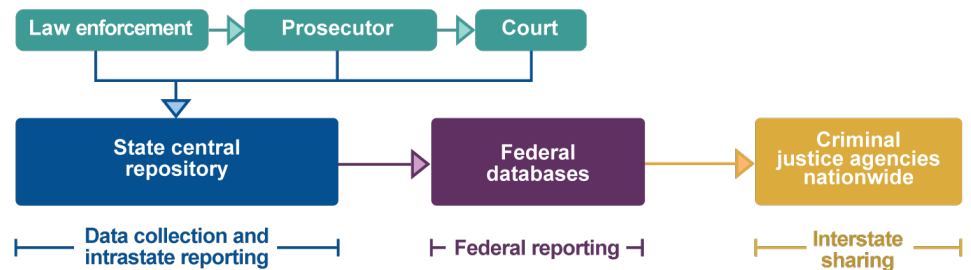
IMPAIRED DRIVING

Information on Data Used to Identify Repeat Offenders

What GAO Found

Various state and local criminal justice agencies collect information on impaired drivers—including arrest reports, fingerprints, and dispositions (i.e., the results of criminal proceedings)—and report it to state central repositories. Through a largely automated process, these central repositories report, or make accessible, criminal history information—including on impaired-driving offenders—to fingerprint-based databases maintained by Department of Justice's (DOJ) Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). There are no federal statutory reporting requirements. However, all 50 states voluntarily report criminal history information to FBI's databases, which in turn are accessible to criminal justice agencies nationwide. These agencies can use the databases to identify repeat impaired-driving offenders. For example, a law enforcement officer may query FBI's databases to check whether a suspected impaired driver has prior impaired-driving convictions, including in another state.

General Process Used by States for Collecting, Reporting, and Sharing Impaired-driving Data That Can Be Used to Identify Repeat Offenders



Source: GAO summary of Department of Justice documentation and information from selected states. | GAO-23-105859

Selected states face challenges collecting complete impaired-driving information but not reporting it to federal databases, due to the automation of the reporting process. According to stakeholders, challenges to collecting data included:

- **Insufficient staff and training.** Some state and local agencies do not have enough staff to enter dispositions into court reporting systems, or have staff who are insufficiently trained to properly capture fingerprints.
- **Lack of equipment and technology.** Law enforcement officers may not have mobile scanners to capture fingerprints in the field, and courtrooms may lack machines to electronically record fingerprints. In addition, some states do not have unified court reporting systems for dispositions.

Officials from selected states reported using three DOJ and three Department of Transportation grant programs, and other federal resources, to help address challenges to collecting impaired-driving data. For example, selected states used grant funds to purchase machines that electronically capture fingerprints; to train law enforcement and prosecutors on impaired driving issues; and to enhance court reporting systems for dispositions. States also used federal training and technical assistance to help collect accurate, complete, and timely criminal history information, including on impaired driving.