

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107099](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal police forces play a key role in maintaining the safety and security of federal property, employees, and the general public. Federal law generally does not consider most of these officers to be law enforcement officers for the purpose of receiving enhanced retirement benefits and pay. However, over time, legislation has provided federal police forces at some agencies enhanced retirement benefits, even when they did not meet the legal statutory and regulatory definitions of a law enforcement officer. Some agencies have cited challenges recruiting or retaining federal police officers because of the difference in retirement benefits and pay compared to statutory law enforcement officers.

The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 includes a provision for GAO to report on considerations regarding retirement and pay issues for federal police officers. This report provides information on (1) characteristics and duties of the federal police officer workforce; (2) changes agencies can make regarding retirement and pay; and (3) considerations regarding implementation, finance, and workforce planning to help inform congressional decision-making regarding changes to retirement and pay.

To conduct this work, GAO administered two surveys—one to eight departments and another to 17 components within these departments—to gather their perspectives. GAO analyzed past GAO and OPM studies on this topic and used OPM data to conduct analysis.

View [GAO-25-107099](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at GoodwinG@gao.gov.

April 2025

FEDERAL POLICE OFFICERS

Considerations on Retirement and Pay

What GAO Found

Federal police officer primary duties include the preservation of the peace, crime prevention and detection, and responding to emergencies on or near federal property. At the end of fiscal year 2023, 17 agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, employed approximately 12,600 federal police officers within eight executive branch departments. The majority work for the Departments of Defense (49 percent) and Veterans Affairs (32 percent).

Federal Bureau of Investigation Police Officers



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation – FBIJobs.gov. | GAO-25-107099

Seven of 17 federal agencies GAO surveyed stated that federal police officer activities have changed since fiscal year 2014. Agencies cited an increased threat environment, civil unrest, and the need for overtime to address staffing shortages as examples of changes in working conditions for federal police officers.

Federal police officers generally do not receive enhanced retirement benefits. These enhanced benefits accrue at a higher rate over a shorter period of time than standard federal employee retirement benefits. However, if a department determines that a group of employees, such as federal police officers, meets certain criteria to receive enhanced retirement benefits, it notifies the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), which will review the decision for statutory compliance. None of the eight executive branch departments GAO surveyed had done so for their federal police officers in the past 10 years. GAO's analysis of OPM data showed that federal police across these departments are on nine different pay plans and various specialized pay rates within some of those plans, creating variation.

GAO identified a range of considerations regarding potential changes to federal police officers' retirement and pay provisions. These include whether to account for past service, whether federal police officers need to meet physical suitability standards, and whether to provide opt-in or opt-out options. Additionally, changes regarding retirement or pay could have budgetary effects on departments and agencies. For example, retroactively applying enhanced retirement benefits could be very costly to departments and agencies.