

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107460](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

MARAD is tasked with fostering, promoting, and developing the U.S. maritime industry to meet the nation's economic and security needs. MARAD's wide-ranging responsibilities makes workforce planning critically important. Strategic human capital management across government is an issue on GAO's High Risk List. In July 2024, MARAD hired a contractor to help the agency develop a strategic workforce plan.

This report examines (1) current workforce challenges MARAD faces, (2) how MARAD is addressing its workforce challenges, and (3) the extent to which MARAD has incorporated key workforce planning principles into its strategic workforce plan.

GAO reviewed MARAD policies, procedures, and documents related to the agency's strategic workforce planning efforts. GAO also interviewed MARAD and Department of Transportation officials and analyzed MARAD data. GAO evaluated the information from documents and interviews against key workforce planning principles.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations, including that MARAD assess critical skills and develop a strategy to address any future skill gaps identified in the forthcoming strategic workforce plan. The Department of Transportation agreed with our recommendations.

View [GAO-25-107460](#). For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at (202) 512-2834 or [VonAhA@gao.gov](mailto:VonAhA@gao.gov).

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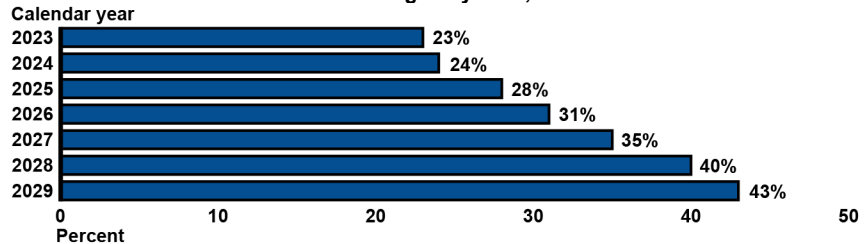
## MARITIME ADMINISTRATION

### Actions Needed to Help Address Workforce Challenges

## What GAO Found

Renewed interest in revitalizing America's maritime industrial base has driven interest in the sufficiency of the workforce at the Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration (MARAD). While MARAD's budget grew by approximately 314 percent from fiscal years 2015 through 2024, the agency faces staff turnover and numerous vacancies in key positions. As of September 2024, MARAD had a 12.3 percent vacancy rate—116 vacancies out of 941 authorized full-time positions. In addition, MARAD separated 235 more employees than it hired over the last 10 years. According to MARAD officials, these vacancies have made it increasingly difficult for the staff to accomplish their mission. Furthermore, the number of retirement-eligible staff is projected to increase, from 24 percent in 2024 to 43 percent by calendar year 2029 (see fig.). To address these challenges, MARAD has expanded the use of hiring flexibilities to help recruit qualified candidates, begun employee engagement efforts, and developed a recruitment and outreach plan. In July 2024, MARAD hired a contractor to develop a strategic workforce plan. Agency officials expect the plan to be completed in September 2025.

**Maritime Administration Retirement Eligibility Rate, Calendar Years 2023-2029**



Source: GAO analysis of Maritime Administration data. | GAO-25-107460

GAO found that MARAD has not fully implemented key strategic workforce planning principles into its forthcoming strategic workforce plan. For example, GAO has previously reported that agencies should determine critical skills needed to achieve current and future goals and assess any skill gaps. MARAD officials said that the contractor will conduct a workforce analysis that includes identifying workforce competencies and skills as part of the forthcoming workforce plan. However, the agency has yet to fully determine future skills that may be needed. Individual program offices, such as the office of Shipyards and Marine Engineering, told GAO that they anticipate needing additional expertise in certain skillsets, such as cybersecurity and artificial intelligence, in the years ahead. However, MARAD has not yet determined overall how it will assess future skill gaps such as these, or other skills, needed within the agency as a whole. MARAD officials said they have not fully assessed the workforce skills needed because the strategic workforce plan is still in development. Nevertheless, without fully determining the skill gaps needed to achieve future results and developing a strategy to address them, MARAD will not have assurance that its workforce is best positioned to meet current and future mission needs.