

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-147](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

BOP is the largest employer within DOJ and is responsible for the care and custody of an inmate population of about 186,000. BOP has faced challenges retaining staff at correctional facilities, although it has used retention incentives, along with other human capital flexibilities. GAO was asked to review BOP's use of retention incentives.

This report addresses: (1) how BOP used its authority to pay retention incentives; (2) internal controls BOP has in place for the use of retention incentives; and (3) the extent to which BOP plans for and evaluates the use of retention incentives. GAO obtained employee-level retention incentive expenditure data from DOJ's Justice Management Division for fiscal years 2012 through 2016. GAO also reviewed agency documentation, such as policy statements and 40 randomly selected retention incentive application packet case files from fiscal years 2014 through 2016. GAO also interviewed officials from BOP's Central Office and four correctional facilities that use retention incentives, selected to reflect variation in the number and types of employees receiving retention incentives, BOP regions, and BOP institution security levels.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that BOP (1) include human capital goals and how retention incentives will be used to achieve these goals in its human capital plan; and (2) evaluate the use of retention incentives. BOP concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-18-147](#). For more information, contact Diana Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or maurerd@gao.gov.

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BUREAU OF PRISONS

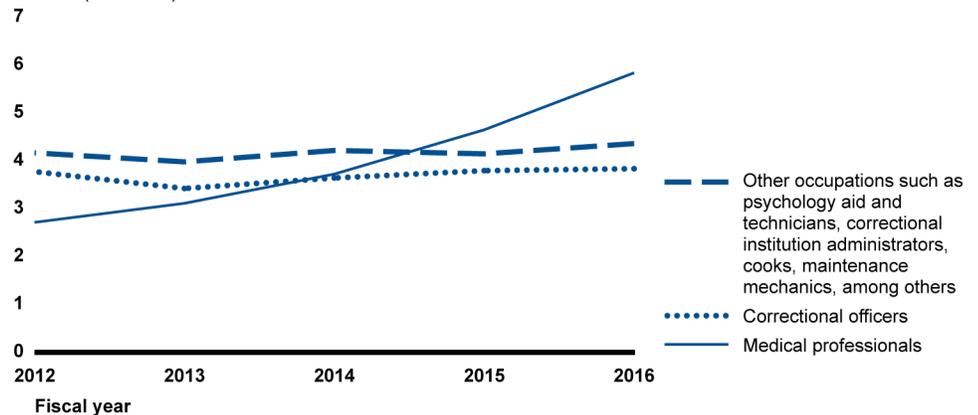
Better Planning and Evaluation Could Help Ensure Effective Use of Retention Incentives

What GAO Found

From fiscal years 2012 to 2016, the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Federal Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) total retention incentive expenditures generally increased from \$10.7 to \$14.0 million and the number of employees receiving retention incentives increased from 2,024 to 2,460. During those five years, BOP spent more than 97 percent of its total retention incentive expenditures on employees at four BOP institutions in California and for medical professionals nationwide. Further, total retention incentive expenditures for medical professionals increased by an average of 21 percent per year (see figure). According to BOP officials, BOP uses retention incentives, for example, to supplement BOP's medical professionals' salaries which are generally lower than private sector salaries.

Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) Retention Incentive Expenditures by Groups of Occupations, Fiscal Years 2012- 2016

Dollars (in millions)



Source: GAO analysis of BOP retention incentive data. | GAO-18-147

BOP has a variety of internal controls in place throughout the retention incentive process that help ensure retention incentive applications and approvals meet requirements. For example, each application goes through multiple levels of review to verify its accuracy and completeness.

BOP takes steps to determine workforce needs and how to fill those needs, but has not strategically planned for and evaluated its use of retention incentives. According to BOP, planning for human capital needs is conducted at institutions during quarterly meetings, but discussions about these incentives respond to short-term staffing situations rather than proactively addressing future staffing needs. Including human capital goals and strategies in BOP's human capital plan would create a roadmap so the agency could move from being reactive to its current workforce needs to being strategic in trying to achieve its long-term workforce goals. Additionally BOP has not evaluated the effectiveness of its use of retention incentives in retaining staff. As a result, BOP does not know whether retention incentives have contributed to employees' retention in relation to other incentives used by BOP. Consistent with key principles for strategic human capital planning, planning for and evaluating the use of retention incentives could help BOP better determine if these incentives are an efficient and effective means by which to retain staff.