United States Government Accountability Office

Report to Congressional Requesters

September 2023

PRETRIAL SUPERVISION

Actions Needed to Enhance Management of the Location Monitoring Program

Accessible Version

GAO-23-105873

GAO Highlights

Highlights of GAO-23-105873, a report to congressional requesters

September 2023

PRETRIAL SUPERVISION

Actions Needed to Enhance Management of the Location Monitoring Program

Why GAO Did This Study

From calendar years 2018-2022, about 25 percent of individuals released while awaiting trial were required to use a monitoring device as a condition of their release. When an individual fails to adhere to location monitoring restrictions, the monitoring device will signal an alert.

GAO was asked to examine the Administrative Office's management of pretrial release location monitoring. This report describes (1) how the Administrative Office manages its location monitoring program and assesses its districts' adherence to policies, (2) characteristics of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring and obstacles they face, and (3) challenges pretrial services officers encounter with alert response and the extent to which the Administrative Office has initiatives to address challenges.

Among other methods, GAO analyzed the Administrative Office's pretrial population data and surveyed chiefs in each of 93 district offices—receiving 79 responses. GAO also interviewed officials and a variety of personnel from six districts to obtain perspectives and analyzed the Administrative Office's initiatives to address challenges against its own guidance, internal controls, and human capital standards.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to the Administrative Office, including that it develop a method to collect and analyze data on the underlying cause of alerts and the length of time it takes officers to investigate certain alerts. The Administrative Office said it will consider these recommendations as it replaces its current data system.

View GAO-23-105873. For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or GoodwinG@gao.gov.

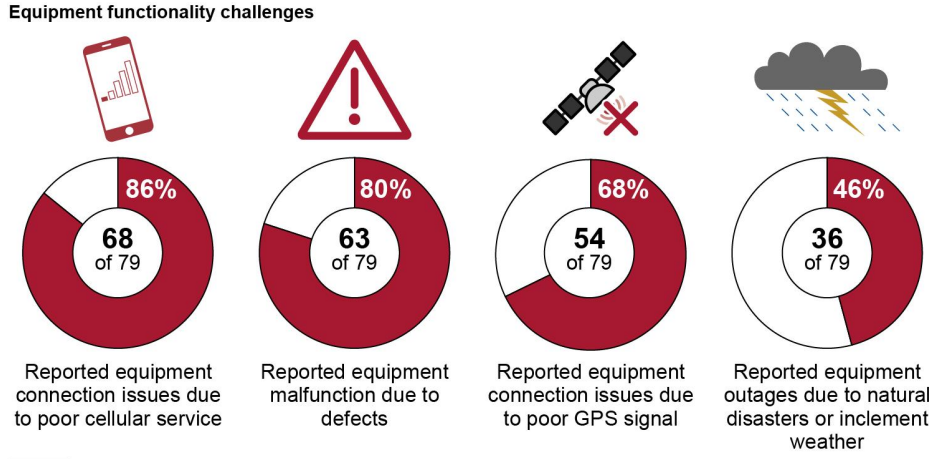
What GAO Found

To implement its location monitoring program, the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (Administrative Office) contracts with a single provider to supply location monitoring equipment, train officers, and assist with alert response. Further, the Administrative Office reviews each of the 93 district offices with pretrial services every 5 years, in part to ensure they adhere to location monitoring policies.

GAO's data analysis showed similar characteristics among individuals with court-ordered location monitoring. Generally, they were male (85 percent) and had zero new criminal charges while under supervision (92 percent). Nevertheless, these individuals faced obstacles. For example, according to federal defenders GAO interviewed, some companies may not hire these individuals because of monitoring-related scheduling restrictions or the visibility of the location monitoring device.

Location monitoring poses challenges for officers due to the demands of alert response 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. According to a GAO survey, this includes challenges related to equipment connection errors (see figure). The Administrative Office has initiatives to address some challenges, such as developing an emergency response team to help in the case of natural disasters. However, the Administrative Office does not fully collect and analyze data on the underlying causes of certain location monitoring alerts. In addition, the Administrative Office does not track the length of time it takes officers to respond to and investigate certain alerts. With this data, the Administrative Office could better understand workload demands, potentially reduce them, and use this information when making staffing decisions.

Number of Chiefs Reporting that Equipment Related Challenges were Moderately or Extremely Challenging in their Districts within the Past Year



Source: GAO survey of Chief Pretrial Services Officers and Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officers; GAO (illustrations). | GAO-23-105873

Data for Number of Chiefs Reporting that Equipment Related Challenges were Moderately or Extremely Challenging in their Districts within the Past Year

	Number of chiefs reporting	Percentage of chiefs who responded to GAO's survey that this was moderately or extremely challenging[a]
Reported equipment connection issues due to poor cellular service	68 of 79	86%
Reported equipment malfunction due to defects	63 of 79	80%
Reported equipment connection issues due to poor GPS signal	54 of 79	68%
Reported equipment outages due to natural disasters or inclement weather	36 of 79	46%

Source: GAO survey of Chief Pretrial Services Officers and Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officers; GAO (illustrations). | GAO-23-105873

[a]The survey asked chiefs "In the past year, how challenging, if at all, have each of the following been for location monitoring in your district?"

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Abbreviations

GPS	Global Positioning System
LEAP	Law Enforcement Availability Pay
PACTS	Probation and Pretrial Services Automated Case Tracking System
PPSO	The Administrative Office of the US Courts' Probation and Pretrial Services Offices

U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE
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September 25, 2023

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget
United States Senate
The Honorable Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr.
House of Representatives

Location monitoring technology allows U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services Officers (officers) to enforce and monitor individuals’ compliance with pretrial release conditions. Court-ordered location monitoring generally requires individuals to wear equipment that uses cellular service, radio frequency and GPS technology to monitor compliance with restrictions on movement outside their homes.[1] For example, some individuals with court-ordered location monitoring can leave their home only for approved activities such as errands, employment, or childcare needs.

Within the federal judiciary, the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (Administrative Office) is responsible for supporting the administration and management of pretrial and post-conviction activities, including the location monitoring program. To meet these responsibilities, the Administrative Office created the Pretrial and Probation Services Office (PPSO), which assists U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services staff in 93 of the 94 judicial districts.[2] Officers within these districts provide recommendations to judges on individuals’ pretrial release.[3] They also supervise individuals to ensure compliance with court-ordered conditions.

According to the Administrative Office’s data, the use of location monitoring devices for individuals awaiting trial while under supervision in their communities has steadily increased in recent years. Specifically, the

[1]Radio frequency and GPS technology equipped location monitoring devices involve the defendant wearing a non-removable device around the ankle.

[2]Probation and pretrial services for the District of the Northern Mariana Islands are provided by the District of Guam. For the purposes of this report, we refer to the 93 districts with probation and pretrial services offices. In some districts, probation and pretrial services are separate offices. In other districts, probation and pretrial services are combined in one office at the discretion of the individual districts.

[3]Federal magistrate judges are typically the judicial officers who make pretrial release decisions.

number of individuals with court-ordered pretrial location monitoring increased from 9,496 in 2018 to 12,287 individuals in 2022. Over the same period, the number of individuals monitored using GPS devices increased by about 50 percent. The increased use of GPS devices has resulted in increased workloads for officers as they must monitor additional location data and investigate potential violations 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. The Administrative Office's effective management of this program is critical to ensuring that officers can respond to these new demands in a timely manner.

You requested that we examine the Administrative Office's management of pretrial release, with a specific emphasis on location monitoring in the judicial districts. This report addresses: (1) how federal pretrial monitoring activities are overseen and implemented, (2) how the Administrative Office manages the use of location monitoring devices and assesses district adherence to its location monitoring policies, (3) characteristics of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring and obstacles they experience, and (4) the type of challenges officers encounter when supervising those with court-ordered location monitoring, and the extent to which the Administrative Office has initiatives in place to address any challenges.

To address all four objectives, we interviewed Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officers, officers, and other relevant stakeholders, such as Assistant U.S. Attorneys and federal public defenders, in six selected districts.[4] We selected districts to ensure a mix of district types and sizes based on the number of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring, the most common types of crimes associated with pretrial individuals, size of metropolitan area, and the number of location monitoring cases per officer. The results of our interviews are not generalizable, but they provide context and illustrative examples of district specific location monitoring practices and experiences within those districts.

To describe how federal pretrial monitoring activities are overseen and implemented we also reviewed relevant policy documents and the Administrative Office's guidance, such as the Guide to Judiciary Policy,

[4]In 77 U.S. judicial districts, the U.S. Probation Office implements pretrial services and is led by a Chief Probation Officer. In 16 U.S. judicial districts, the U.S. Pretrial Services Office, a separate office from the U.S. Probation Office, implements pretrial services and is led by a Chief Pretrial Services Officer.

the Location Monitoring Procedures Manual, and the Administrative Office training requirements for staff.[5]

To examine how the Administrative Office manages the use of location monitoring devices and its efforts to ensure districts are adhering to its location monitoring policies, we also reviewed the Administrative Office's contract with the provider of monitoring devices and spoke with the provider's representatives to get their perspectives on the contract requirements and implementation. We also interviewed the Administrative Office's contracting officer representative to understand the implementation of the contract. Further, we reviewed the Administrative Office's 5-year review results from its monitoring efforts to understand deficiencies it found across districts specific to location monitoring. Additionally, we sent an electronic survey to all 93 chiefs to understand their perspectives on district efforts to adhere to the Administrative Office's policy. Of the 93 chiefs that were sent the survey, 79 responded, yielding an 85 percent response rate. For more information concerning our survey methodology and content please see appendices I and II.

To help characterize respondent data in this report, we use modifiers (e.g., "most" and "several") to quantify the views of the 79 chiefs who completed our survey. We define these modifiers as follows: (1) "nearly all" chiefs represents 67 or more chiefs (which is approximately 85 percent or more of respondents) (2) "most" chiefs represents between 40 and 66 chiefs (which is between approximately 50 and 84 percent of the respondents); (3) "many" chiefs represents 16 to 39 chiefs (which is between approximately 20 and 49 percent of respondents); (4) "some" chiefs represents 15 or less chiefs (which is approximately less than 20 percent of respondents). However, in many places throughout the report, we also provide the specific number of respondents. We use these same modifiers to describe the results of our data analysis.

To describe characteristics of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring, we also analyzed the Administrative Office's location monitoring data over the last 5 calendar years (2018 to 2022). Specifically, we analyzed demographics data and the number of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring who failed to appear in

[5]The Guide to Judiciary Policy is divided into volumes that deal with different aspects of the judiciary. Volume 8 outlines all policies related to Probation and Pretrial Services and includes sections on various topics including bail reports, officer's investigations, and location monitoring.

court, absconded from monitoring, or received new charges.[6] We assessed the reliability of the data by reviewing data documentation; interviewing knowledgeable officials; and conducting electronic testing to identify missing values, outliers, or other obvious errors. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of reporting the characteristics of those with court-ordered location monitoring. To describe the obstacles individuals with court-ordered location monitoring experience, we interviewed federal defenders to obtain their perspectives on challenges these individuals experience.

To understand the challenges that officers supervising individuals with court-ordered location monitoring encountered, we also analyzed data from the Administrative Office on the volume and characteristics of location monitoring alerts to help us further understand the workload for location monitoring officers. To determine the extent to which the Administrative Office has initiatives in place to address identified challenges, we requested information about this in our survey and asked the Administrative Office officials responsible for overseeing the districts and the location monitoring program about any efforts in place to address identified challenges. We reviewed agency responses and documents, including the Administrative Office's Location Monitoring Procedures Manual, for information concerning their policies in place.

Further, we assessed whether the agency's processes for analyzing the underlying cause of location monitoring alerts aligned with the agency's strategic plan, which calls for promoting data-driven decision making by developing and enhancing analytics tools. We also assessed these processes against our criteria on internal controls—specifically, that management should use quality information to achieve the entity's objectives.[7] Additionally, we assessed the agency's efforts to measure the workload associated with responding to location monitoring alerts against our criteria on human capital planning, and the Federal Judiciary's Strategic Plan, which cites harnessing the potential of technology to identify and meet the needs of judiciary users as a key strategy.[8] For

[6]According to the Administrative Office officials, an absconsion refers to instances where an individual does not report to the pretrial services office as directed.

[7]See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO-14-704G (Washington, D.C.: September 2014); Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, Strategic Direction for the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (Washington, D.C.: April 2022).

[8]See GAO, *Federal Protective Service: Enhancements to Performance Measures and Data Quality Processes Could Improve Human Capital Planning*, GAO-16-384 (Washington, D.C.: March, 24, 2016) and Judicial Conference of the United States, Strategic Plan for the Federal Judiciary (Washington, D.C.: September 2020).

additional information on our objectives, scope, and methodology, see appendix I.

We conducted this performance audit from March 2022 to September 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Overview of Federal Pretrial Judicial Process

By law, when an individual is charged with certain federal offenses and appears in front of a judicial officer, the officer is required to determine whether that individual may be released or detained, pending trial.[9] When making a determination for pretrial release, the judicial officer must consider whether there are conditions of release that will reasonably assure the appearance of the person in court, as required, and the safety of any other person and the community.[10] Generally, if a judicial officer determines that conditions are necessary for release, the judicial officer must order the individual not to commit another crime during the period of release.[11] In addition, the judicial officer must also consider the least restrictive conditions or combination of conditions that will reasonably assure the individual's appearance in court and protect the safety of other persons and the community.[12]

PPSO supports the probation and pretrial services officers in the judicial districts through administration and management of pretrial and post-

[9]18 U.S.C. § 3142(a).

[10]Under 18 U.S.C. § 3142(g), the judicial officer shall, in determining whether there are conditions of release that will reasonably assure the appearance of the person as required and the safety of any other person and the community, take into account the available information, including, but not limited to, the nature and circumstances of the offense charged; the weight of the evidence against the person; and the history and characteristics of the person.

[11]18 U.S.C. § 3142(c)(1)(A).

[12]18 U.S.C. § 3142(c)(1)(B).

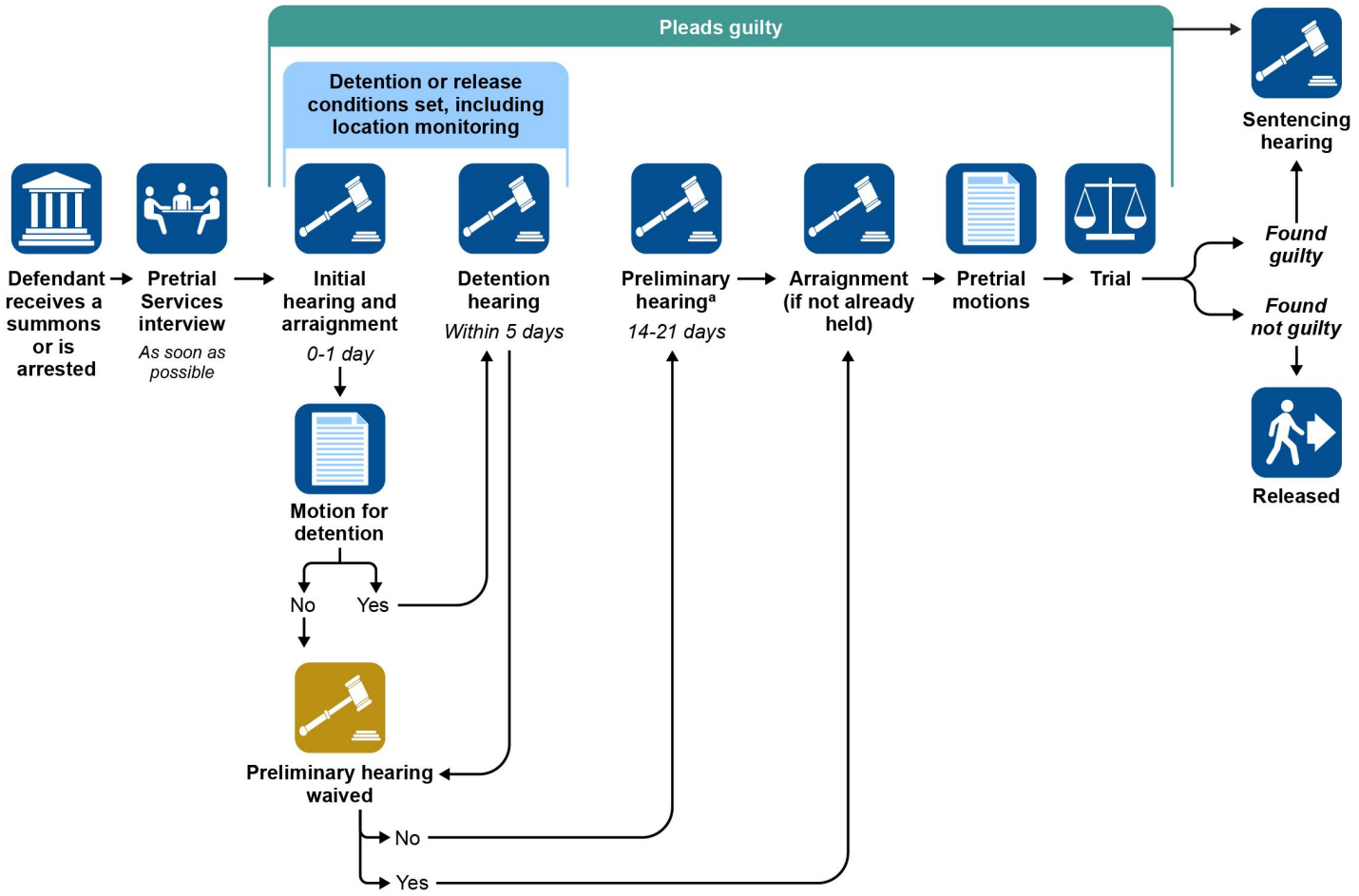
conviction activities. PPSO also provides staff support for the Judicial Conference Committee on Criminal Law, in coordination with other offices within the Administrative Office, and external stakeholders, including the U.S. Sentencing Commission, the Federal Judicial Center, and the U.S. Department of Justice.[13] In the 93 districts with a Probation and Pretrial Services Office, a Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officer (chief) is responsible for managing the functions of a district's office and reporting to the courts they serve. Chiefs and officers also coordinate with stakeholders, including federal prosecutors, defense counsel, U.S. Marshals, and the Bureau of Prisons.[14]

Individuals charged with federal crimes are generally required to appear before the court throughout the judicial process including the initial appearance, arraignment, pretrial hearings, trial, and sentencing. As illustrated in figure 1, generally, according to the Administrative Office's guidance, a pretrial services officer interviews the individual immediately following arrest. Then, the individual attends an initial hearing where the judicial officer determines whether to grant the individual pretrial release and also determines what set of conditions, if any, will reasonably assure the individual's appearance in court and ensure the safety of individuals and the community. The court may order individuals to be placed on location monitoring, a tool that officers use to (1) monitor compliance with conditions ordered by the court, (2) manage or mitigate identified risk factors, and (3) verify approved defendant locations at their residence or in the community.

[13]The Judicial Conference serves as the policymaking body for the federal courts. The Judicial Conference's Criminal Law Committee oversees the federal probation and pretrial services system. The Committee addresses the system's operations, workload, funding, and resources, as well as employment standards for system employees and issues pertaining to the administration of criminal law.

[14]Assistant U.S. Attorneys are the prosecutors representing the U.S. government. Federal public defender organizations and private panel attorneys appointed under the Criminal Justice Act represent those unable to pay for legal counsel.

Figure 1: Example of an Individual's Progression through the Federal Pretrial Judicial Process



Source: GAO analysis of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure; GAO (illustrations). | GAO-23-105873

Text for Figure 1: Example of an Individual's Progression through the Federal Pretrial Judicial Process

1. Defendant receives a summons or is arrested
2. Pretrial Services interview (As soon as possible)
3. **Pleads guilty (if yes, then step 12), (if no, then step 4)**
4. Initial hearing and arraignment (0-1 day)
5. **Motion for detention (if yes, then step 6), (if no, then step 7)**
6. Detention hearing (Within 5 days)
7. **Preliminary hearing waived (if yes, then step 9), (if no, then 8)**
8. Preliminary hearing[a] (14-21 days)
9. Arraignment (if not already held)
10. Pretrial motions

11. Trial
12. If Found guilty, then Sentencing hearing
13. If Found not guilty, then Released
Detention or release conditions set, including location monitoring during steps 3-5.

Source: GAO analysis of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure; GAO (illustrations). | GAO-23-105873

[a]Courts may schedule a preliminary hearing less than 14 days following the initial hearing. In some instances, courts conduct the preliminary hearing in conjunction with the detention hearing. If a defendant is indicted, there is no preliminary hearing. A defendant is only entitled to a preliminary hearing if there is not an indictment. After a preliminary hearing occurs (or is waived), an indictment must be obtained. Generally, an indictment must be obtained within 30 days of arrest. An arraignment would only occur after an indictment is returned.

Location Monitoring and the Types of Equipment

Individuals with court-ordered location monitoring must adhere to restrictions on their location or their movement in the community during specific hours that the court has determined. The level of restriction and the degree to which individuals with court-ordered location monitoring can leave their residence is case-specific. The least restrictive type of location restriction is a curfew, which requires that individuals remain in their home during set times during the day or night. The second least restrictive is home detention, which requires individuals to remain in their residence at all times, except for preapproved and scheduled absences for certain reasons such as employment, attorney visits, or religious activities. The most restrictive is home incarceration, which requires that individuals remain in their home for 24 hours a day, except for medical necessities and court appearances or other activities specifically approved by the court. Individuals under home incarceration may not leave their home for discretionary, essential, or religious activities without the court's permission.[15] When an individual fails to adhere to location monitoring restrictions, the monitoring device will signal an alert. Each district uses a national standard alert process for pretrial services officers to follow when investigating the alert.

Individuals with court-ordered location monitoring may be placed on one of four types of monitoring technologies. The most common technologies are Radio Frequency and Global Positioning System (GPS).[16] The use of

[15]Both discretionary leave and essential leave have distinct rules governing the request and approval process. Discretionary leave generally relates to social and family activities. Essential leave generally relates to activities required to maintain a basic standard of living, such as grocery shopping, banking, or caring for dependents

[16]The least common technologies are Voice Recognition, where individuals must respond to random or scheduled phone calls, and Virtual Monitoring Supervision, where individuals respond to random mobile device notifications.

radio frequency devices requires individuals to wear a non-removable device around the ankle that reports when they are in and out of range of their approved zone. Officers establish and set this range based on the individual's range of movement, based on factors such as the individual's case or type of residence, among others. The use of GPS devices also requires that the individual wear a non-removable device around the ankle. GPS devices detect individuals' locations 24 hours a day, 7 days a week via locational data acquired from GPS satellites, cellular towers, and Wi-Fi signals.

Individuals on GPS devices may also be required to avoid certain areas or remain within others. For example, the court may designate inclusion and exclusion zones that limit or exclude individuals' movements to areas the court deems appropriate. Inclusion zones are geographical areas where a participant is required to be during certain times and can include places of work, treatment centers, or buildings for religious services. Exclusion zones are predefined prohibited areas and can include schools, parks, airports, or a victim's residence or place of employment.

The Administrative Office Provides Pretrial Oversight and Support to Judicial Districts that Implement the Pretrial Monitoring Program

The Administrative Office Provides National Level Oversight and Support

The Administrative Office provides the courts and district offices with a broad range of administrative, management, and program oversight and support. The Administrative Office Director has assigned responsibility to PPSO, at the direction of the Judicial Conference, to oversee and support the probation and pretrial services system. As table 1 shows, PPSO support includes the development of policies and tools for managing daily work, as well as resources for managing their offices and stakeholder relationships.

Table 1: Responsibilities of the Probation and Pretrial Services Office (PPSO) and Examples of How Each Supports and Oversees Courts and District Offices

Responsibility	Examples of support and oversight provided
Setting mission, values, and strategic priorities of the federal pretrial system.	PPSO developed a strategic plan which aligns with the broader federal judicial strategic plan. PPSO also created a fiscal year 2023 mission, values and strategic priorities document that outlines specific priorities which are also mapped to the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts strategic plan.
Developing policies and tools	PPSO developed the Pretrial Risk Assessment tool, which helps officers predict individuals' risks of non-appearance or re-offense based on questions about their criminal history, personal history, and current circumstances.
Providing training and education programs	PPSO created a training program called the Detention Reduction Outreach Program with the aim to educate pretrial services officers as well as interested stakeholders on the best practices for reducing unnecessary pretrial detention.
Developing budgets and allocating resources	PPSO supports the development of an annual national financial plan that includes steps such as financing, gathering requirements, and balancing the budget if requirements are greater than the financing.
Coordinating working groups	PPSO convenes a Chiefs' Advisory Group that includes select chief probation and pretrial services officers and meets monthly with the purpose of representing the field's perspective in conversations with PPSO and offering guidance to the districts. Further, the Administrative Office has a Pretrial Services Working Group comprised of pretrial service officers, who support pretrial policy and procedure development.
Engaging with judiciary policymaking bodies	PPSO supports the Criminal Law Committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States and may propose policy changes based on research within PPSO.[a]
Providing pretrial monitoring expertise to support judicial training	PPSO coordinates with the Federal Judicial Center, a judicial agency responsible for training and research in the judicial branch. Educators worked to develop a training program titled Pretrial Decision Making for Magistrate Judges, which has been offered since 2014.
Conducting five year cyclical reviews	PPSO conducts oversight through reviews conducted in every district on a rotating basis. These monitoring reviews cover a wide range of district responsibilities, including pretrial and post-conviction supervision practices and supporting individuals undergoing substance abuse or mental health treatment.

Source: GAO Analysis of Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts Documentation. | GAO-23-105873

[a]The Judicial Conference convenes twice a year to consider administrative and policy issues affecting the federal court system, and to make recommendations to Congress concerning legislation involving the Judicial Branch. The Criminal Law Committee oversees the U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services System including Pretrial Monitoring.

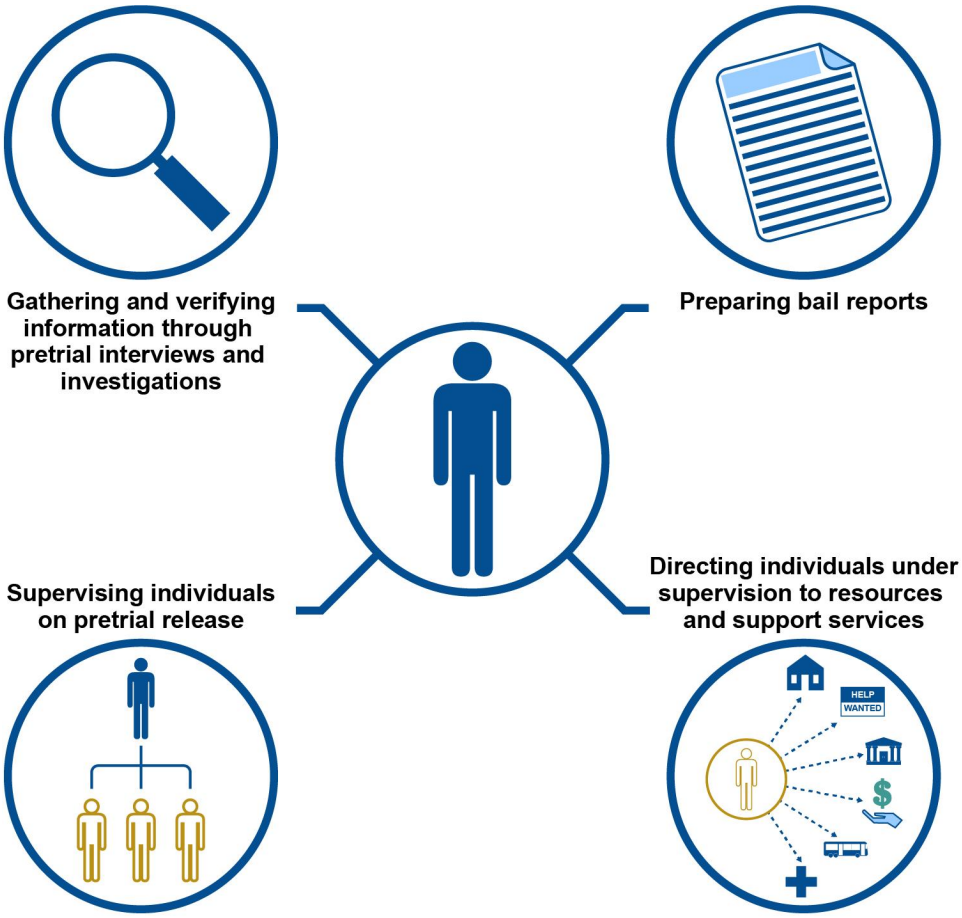
Independent District Offices Implement Monitoring Activities

U.S. probation and pretrial services offices are responsible for implementing pretrial monitoring activities across independent judicial districts each with unique structures and circumstances. All are governed by Judiciary Policy, but also have the ability to create district-specific guidance that complements national guidance and addresses any unique needs of the district. Districts differ based on the size, geography, and the types of crimes committed in the district. The responsibilities and working

conditions for pretrial services offices will also vary across districts. According to the chiefs and officers we interviewed, working as a probation or pretrial services officer in a metropolitan area is considerably different than in a rural or sparsely populated area. This is because officers working in less populated areas sometimes must travel long distances to fulfill their supervision responsibilities. They also may have access to fewer resources and support services for individuals than their urban counterparts, especially for substance abuse, mental health treatment or employment assistance.

U.S. pretrial services officers investigate and supervise individuals charged with or convicted of federal crimes, and carry out other duties, as illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2: The General Responsibilities of a Federal Pretrial Services Officer



Source: GAO analysis of Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts policy; GAO (illustrations). | GAO-23-105873

Officers in judicial districts carry out the following duties:

- **Gathering and verifying information through pretrial interviews and investigations.** This involves learning more about individuals who come before the courts such as their employment history, past criminal history, place of residence, and family and community support systems. These interviews happen immediately after arrest and they follow up with family contacts to verify the information.

Factors Included in Bail Reports

A bail report can also be referred to as a pretrial services report, depending on the district's preferences, and is completed by the pretrial services officer based on an interview prior to the initial court appearance. The exact report differs across each district but generally contains the following information:

- Defendant history and residence
- Employment history and financial resources
- Health information
- Criminal history
- Assessment of risk of flight or endangerment to the community
- Recommendation on detention or release with conditions

Source: Sample Bail Report Provided by Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. | GAO-23-105873

- **Preparing bail reports.** Such reports aim to summarize the information that the U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services office collects, and contain recommendations to the courts on release decisions and monitoring conditions. If the bail report recommends release, the officer provides the court with suggested conditions of release in the bail report, which may include location monitoring.
- **Supervising individuals on pretrial release**. Officers we spoke with across all six selected districts stated that supervising individuals on pretrial release, particularly those assigned to location monitoring, can be labor intensive. Officers must maintain regular contact with the individuals they supervise and conduct regular community and personal visits, which include equipment inspections. Additionally, officers must verify and approve all location monitoring leave activities for individuals court-ordered to home detention or home incarceration. One officer told us that officers must review and approve all deviations from the individuals' normal schedules and may receive alerts if they do not enter schedules into the monitoring system correctly or in a timely manner.
- **Directing individuals under supervision to resources and support services.** Such services include substance use disorder treatment, mental health treatment, medical care, training, and

employment assistance.[17] Officers we spoke with in all six selected districts stated that providing support services can be difficult depending on what is required. For example, one officer told us that not all participants may be appropriate for location monitoring due to mental health concerns or needs because of the types of challenges the person may be facing. However, judges may order the condition of location monitoring and officers must find a way to monitor, supervise, and offer support. Moreover, chiefs who responded to our survey identified areas where training was insufficient or not offered related to support services. For example, some respondents (15 of the 79 chiefs) indicated that training on providing support services to those with mental health challenges was either not offered or insufficient. In addition, many respondents (31 of the 79 chiefs) indicated that training on providing support services to those who have suffered traumatic events was either not offered or insufficient.[18]

Further, Judiciary Policy requires that officers follow the Location Monitoring Procedures Manual, which contains guidance on installing location monitoring equipment and supervising individuals with court-ordered location monitoring. The Administrative Office oversees the manual's content, and officials stated they make procedural revisions based on operational changes, best practices from the field, and advancements to location monitoring technologies. The chiefs we interviewed in all six selected districts stated they use this manual and found the guidance useful. Districts also have flexibility to create district-specific guidance based on unique district needs or practices that complements the Location Monitoring Procedures Manual. In our survey, most respondents (51 of the 79 chiefs) indicated that their office has established supplemental protocols for their district.[19] One district chief we interviewed stated there are supplemental policies in their district, beyond what Judiciary Policy provides, on how officers should track and process

[17]Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3142(c)(1)(B)(x), as part of the conditions for release, a judicial officer may include the condition that the person undergo available medical, psychological, or psychiatric treatment, including treatment for drug or alcohol dependency, and remain in a specified institution if required for that purpose.

[18]See question 9 in appendix II for the full survey question. For mental health treatment, 32 respondents stated the training is sufficient and 28 stated it was moderately sufficient. Three respondents were unsure if the training was sufficient. For training on supporting those who have undergone trauma, 19 respondents stated that the training was sufficient and 21 stated it was moderately sufficient. Seven were unsure if the training was sufficient.

[19]See question 2 in appendix II for the full survey question. Twenty-eight respondents indicated that they do not establish additional protocols.

essential leave requests and schedule changes for individuals with court-ordered location monitoring.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys and Defense Attorneys May Influence Judges' Release and Detention Decisions

Individuals within district stakeholder organizations, including Assistant U.S. Attorneys (prosecutors) and defense attorneys, may influence a judge's final determination on release or detention, as well as the conditions assigned if the judge grants release. The judge's decision affects the workload for the pretrial services officers, particularly if the decision is for release with several conditions. Defense attorneys can seek release of their clients and the prosecutors can make a recommendation to the judge to detain a defendant if they believe the client poses a threat to public safety or there is a risk of flight.

In our survey, 30 of the 78 chiefs who answered the question indicated they provide location monitoring training to Assistant U.S. Attorneys and 22 indicated they provide location monitoring training to public defenders.[20] In our interviews with Assistant U.S. Attorneys from the six selected districts, all stated that they have generally good relationships with the pretrial services officers.

To make the final decision on an individual's release conditions, the judicial officers apply the appropriate statutory requirements and use the bail report and the recommendations from the officer and both the prosecution and defense. Specifically, the judicial officers determine whether there is a reasonable assurance the defendant will appear at the scheduled court hearings as required and whether the offender will threaten the safety of any other person and the community if released. In our survey, most respondents (57 of the 79 chiefs) indicated they train judicial officers.[21]

The Administrative Office Manages Location Monitoring Devices with Contractor Support

[20]See questions 11 and 13 in appendix II for the full survey questions. For training Assistant U.S. Attorneys, 47 respondents indicated they did not train them and one was unsure. For training public defenders, 56 respondents indicated they did not train them and one was unsure.

[21]See question 15 in appendix II for the full survey question. Twenty-two of the 79 respondents stated they did not train judges.

and Reviews Districts to Assess Policy Adherence

The Administrative Office Uses a Contractor to help Manage the Location Monitoring Program

The Administrative Office awards and manages a contract on behalf of the courts with a single provider to supply location monitoring equipment, provide equipment and software training for officers, and provide technical assistance in regard to responding to alerts. While districts receive monthly vendor invoices, the Administrative Office is the contracting office and funding comes from a single appropriation. This includes managing coordination, failures, and deficiencies resulting from equipment or services acquired by the government when officers identify such deficiencies and report them to the location monitoring contracting officer representative. The contractor is also responsible for providing replacement equipment as needed, and maintaining spare equipment at each court unit's specified locations.

The Administrative Office contract includes the services of a monitoring call center, in addition to standard technical assistance, which districts may choose to use to assist with location monitoring alerts.[22] In districts that use the monitoring call center, the contractor sends certain types of alerts directly to a contractor employee who conducts an initial investigation before the officer receives notification of the alert in certain situations. The contractor attempts to resolve the alert within an approved time frame using a written script created by the Administrative Office Location Monitoring Administrator so the officer does not need to respond in certain situations. If the contractor is unable to resolve the alert, the officer will receive the alert along with the results of the contractor investigation. The goal of the contracted monitoring call center is to provide workload relief to officers without sacrificing the integrity of the location monitoring program or infringing upon the officer's discretion or authority. In our survey, nearly all respondents (75 chiefs of the 79) indicated that they take advantage of the monitoring call center. Further,

[22]Districts may opt out of using the monitoring call center. Additionally, most serious alerts immediately go to the officer rather than the monitoring call center for resolution. These alerts include instances when individuals enter a geographical area where they are not allowed to visit (e.g., home or workplace of someone they are restricted from seeing) or when individuals attempt to tamper with their location monitoring equipment.

74 of 75 chiefs indicated that the call center either somewhat or significantly reduces the work performed by their officers during non-traditional hours.[23] The officers we spoke with in four of the six selected districts agreed that the monitoring call center has reduced their workload related to alert management and investigations.

The contractor is responsible for training officers on using their software system to enter data and review equipment records. According to the national contract, the contractor must be prepared to provide at least one online training session for each user that covers installation and operation of the equipment. Contractor officials stated that, to receive a login to their system, officers must attend three web-based software training sessions. The contractor must also be prepared to provide in-person training as the court deems necessary in any of the 94 judicial districts if there is a lack of understanding on how to use the equipment. The contractor must also conduct regional in-person training sessions to familiarize users with the equipment and software. In some districts, attending additional contractor training is mandatory for officers. In our survey, nearly all respondents (77 chiefs of the 78 who answered the question) indicated that the training officers receive—irrespective of whether the Administrative Office, the district, or the contractor provided it—is either sufficient or moderately sufficient to understand location monitoring policies.[24]

In addition to completing the contractor's training, officers who work with location monitoring equipment are required to complete and pass the Administrative Office's annual national location monitoring certification exam. The exam covers topics such as policies and guidance for location monitoring and procedures for responding to alerts. Once passed, officers receive their credentials to access the contractor's case management system. All six of the chiefs we interviewed stated that the national contract is useful and that the contractor is available through training, resource provision, troubleshooting equipment and investigating alerts.

The Administrative Office has a Location Monitoring Administrator who is the lead specialist in location monitoring. Officers and chiefs stated that the administrator serves as a resource in their districts for questions on

[23]See questions 5 and 5a in appendix II for the full survey question. Four respondents stated they do not use the monitoring call center. Among those respondents who did state they used the monitoring call center, one indicated it did not have an effect on the amount of work performed by officers during non-traditional hours.

[24]See question 9 in appendix II for the full survey question. One respondent stated that it was not sufficient.

location monitoring equipment. This administrator receives monthly reports on alert statistics, such as the number of alerts in each category.[25] This administrator also receives other data to understand how well the contractor is performing and making corrections as needed to the program.

The Administrative Office Reviews Districts' Location Monitoring Efforts on a Rotating Basis

The Administrative Office conducts cyclical office reviews on a rotating basis of all districts every 5 years to ensure they adhere to national policies and procedures, including pretrial and location monitoring policies.[26] These monitoring reviews cover a wide range of district responsibilities, including pretrial and post-conviction supervision practices and supporting individuals who undergo substance abuse or mental health treatment. Specific to location monitoring, the review covers topics such as the managerial oversight of the officer conducting the monitoring.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Administrative Office conducted the reviews in-person. Administrative Office officials stated that a team made up of Administrative Office employees as well as officers and managers from districts across the country, spent several days in each district examining case files, interviewing staff and stakeholders, and then preparing a comprehensive report on findings and key recommendations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the team began conducting reviews virtually, and stated they then subsequently used a hybrid approach. Administrative Office officials stated this consists of teams reviewing case files remotely and then a smaller team visiting the districts in person to provide more hands-on technical assistance. Teams also use their district visits to observe officer operations in the field. The team lead then prepares a written report for the district chief to review and comment. Once the chief responds, the report goes to the chief judge within each federal district. At the end of the year, the Administrative Office compiles

[25]The Administrative Office receives data from the contractor that has defined several categories for alerts that they receive. These include GPS Zones/Curfew, tracking whether an individual has left their inclusion zones (areas where they are allowed) and/or entered exclusion zones (areas where they are not allowed), tamper alerts, and no motion alerts, tracking whether the bracelet/device has not moved within a defined time frame.

[26]Administrative Office officials told us that they selected 5 years as the review period due to resource and staff availabilities.

the reviews into a summary document that it uses to understand trends over the course of the year across districts.

We reviewed the Administrative Office's summary documents from 2017 to 2021, which included 114 separate district reviews with a variety of finding categories. Specific to location monitoring, we found the most common deficiencies related to location monitoring include officers not conducting a proper range test when installing the equipment (60 of 114 reviews had this deficiency) and supervisors not conducting the proper oversight of the data (55 of 114 reviews had this deficiency).[27] Other issues that were seen across many districts include officers not installing the equipment according to policy (33 of 114 reviews had this deficiency), officers not verifying the activities of individuals while on approved leave (33 of 114 reviews had this deficiency), and officers not reviewing the daily events and alerts each day (31 of 114 reviews had this deficiency).

The Administrative Office stated that they have examined the correlation between the findings in their past reviews and case outcomes (such as recidivism and failure to appear rates) and learned that there is not a strong relationship between the two. To address this difference in outcomes and findings, the Administrative Office stated they are in the process of modifying cyclical reviews. Officials expect that the reviews will continue to follow a hybrid approach—conducting a portion of the review virtually and focusing in-person activities on observation, interviews, and support activities. The Administrative Office stated that it is important to assess whether the district is doing things that evidence-based practices have found may help an individual on pretrial release, such as completing a case plan to help avoid re-arrest. In the future, the Administrative Office officials told us they will consider looking more at the types of programs a district has or the types of trainings officers receive, among other things.

In addition to the Administrative Office's reviews, chiefs also conduct reviews to assess how their respective offices are performing. In our survey, nearly all respondents (71 of the 79 chiefs) stated that they conducted further reviews in addition to the 5-year review. Further, the majority of those respondents (44 of the 71 chiefs who conduct reviews) indicated they conduct reviews annually or more frequently as opposed to 27 respondents who stated they conducted reviews less frequently than

[27]Officers may conduct a range test for GPS and radio frequency devices based on national policies to ensure that individuals have the appropriate approved range of movement programmed within their monitoring equipment.

annually.[28] Three of six chiefs we spoke to stated that these reviews are often based on the 5-year review. These reviews may lead to district policy changes, as 38 of the 71 chiefs who responded to our survey indicated they have made district policy changes based on their internal reviews.[29] One chief stated that the office created a working group focused on improving the quality of location monitoring because the cyclical review suggested that more support for location monitoring officers was required. The chief stated that this working group has provided training and policy guidance, and meets bi-monthly to discuss compliance issues.

Individuals with Court-Ordered Location Monitoring Have Similar Characteristics and Experienced Obstacles Related to Employment and their Daily Schedules

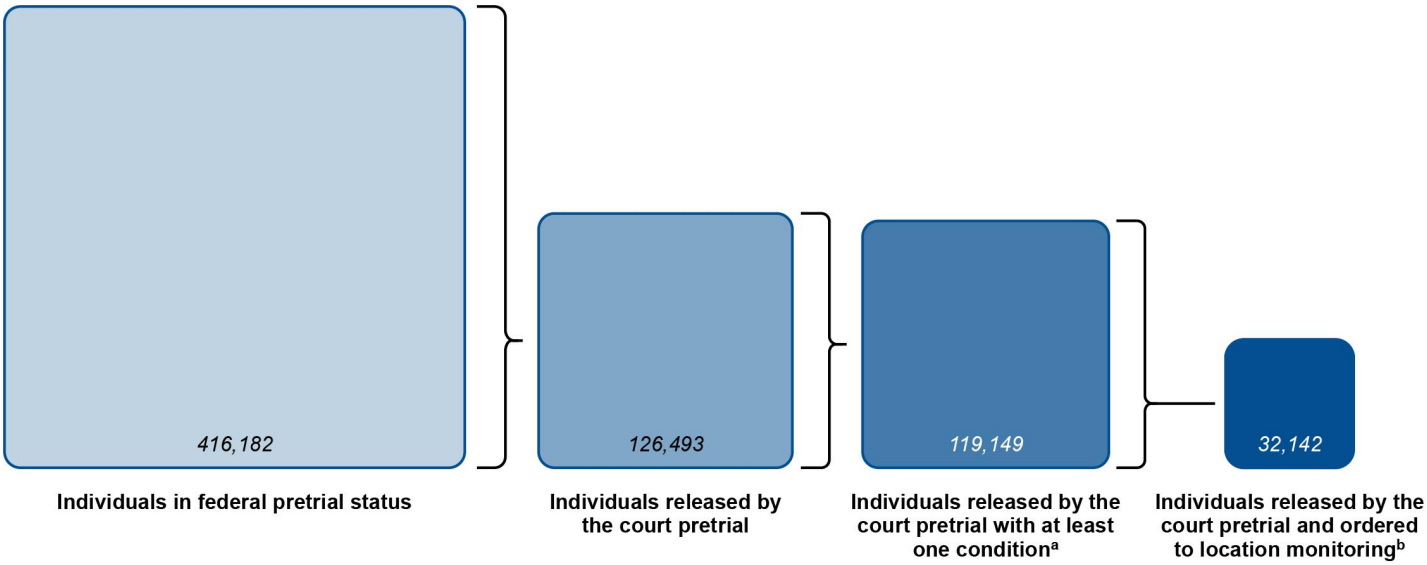
The Quarter of Pretrial Individuals with Court-Ordered Location Monitoring are Mostly Males, U.S. Citizens, and Ages 25-44

According to the Administrative Office, from calendar years 2018 to 2022, about 25 percent of individuals on pretrial release—or 32,142 of 126,493—were subject to court-ordered to location monitoring. As Figure 3 illustrates, 416,182 individuals were in the pretrial phase of the federal criminal justice system between 2018 and 2022, with 30 percent (126,493) granted pretrial release as opposed to detention.

[28]See questions 6 and 6a in appendix II for the full survey questions. Eight respondents stated they did not conduct further reviews. Among those who conducted the reviews, eighteen respondents stated they conducted a review once in the 5-year period and nine respondents stated they conducted reviews every 2 years.

[29]See question 6b in appendix II for the full survey question. Thirty two respondents indicated they did not make changes to the review. One was unsure if they had made changes.

Figure 3: Number of Individuals, by Federal Pretrial Status, Calendar Years 2018-2022



Source: GAO analysis of Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts data. | GAO-23-105873

Data for Figure 3: Number of Individuals, by Federal Pretrial Status, Calendar Years 2018-2022

	Number of individuals
Individuals in federal pretrial status	416,182
Individuals released by the court pretrial	126,493
Individuals released by the court pretrial with at least one condition[a]	119,149
Individuals released by the court pretrial ordered to location monitoring[b]	32,142

Source: GAO analysis of Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts data. | GAO-23-105873

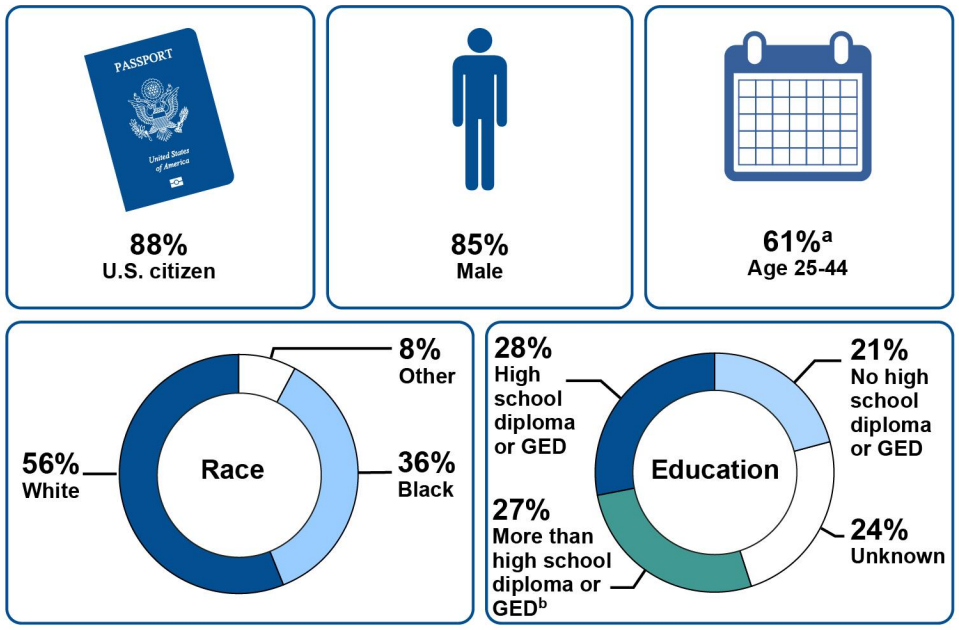
[a]Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3142(c)(1)(A), generally, all individuals released are subject to two mandatory conditions: the condition that the person not commit a federal, state, or local crime during the period of release and the condition that the person cooperate in the collection of a DNA sample. This number represents those with at least one condition, in addition to those.

[b]This is the number of new activations, or the number of individuals who began location monitoring for the first time.

Our analysis of data from the Administrative Office's Probation and Pretrial Services Automated Case Tracking System (PACTS) showed that among individuals with court-ordered location monitoring between 2018 and 2022, nearly all were male, nearly all were U.S. citizens or most were

between the ages of 25-44—as shown along with other demographic information in figure 4.[30]

Figure 4: Demographics of Individuals with Court-Ordered Location Monitoring, Calendar Years 2018-2022



GED General Educational Development test

Source: GAO analysis of Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts data; GAO (illustrations). | GAO-23-105873

Data for Figure 4: Demographics of Individuals with Court-Ordered Location Monitoring, Calendar Years 2018-2022

U.S. citizen	88%			
Male	85%			
Age 25-44	61%[a]			
Race	56% White	36% Black	8% other	
Education	28% High school diploma or GED	27% More than high school diploma or GEDb	21% No high school diploma or GED	24% unknown

Source: GAO analysis of Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts data. | GAO-23-105873

Note: Percentages in this figure represent 43,989 individuals with court-ordered location monitoring from 2018 to 2022. Our statistics are based on the number of individuals with court-ordered location

[30]The PACTS data system contains information on individuals in the pretrial phase of the judicial process, including their demographics, criminal charges, and any instances of violations of their release conditions. Our statistics are based on the number of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring during 2018-2022.

monitoring during 2018-2022. This includes both new activations and those whose term of supervision overlapped with that period, even if it started prior to 2018 or ended after 2022.

[a]Age was calculated using the individual's age at the beginning of their first instance of location monitoring.

[b]More than a high school diploma or GED includes those with an associates, bachelors, masters, or doctoral degree. It also includes those who have completed some college or a vocational/apprenticeship degree.

Most individuals (about 65 percent) who were on court-ordered location monitoring between 2018 and 2022 remained on location monitoring for less than one year.[31] Depending on the district, either judges or pretrial services officers assign individuals a type of location monitoring equipment, based on the factors of their case and the geographic location of the residence.[32] We found that between calendar years 2018 and 2022, the number of individuals monitored using GPS monitoring devices increased by 22 percent while the number of individuals monitored using radio frequency devices decreased by about 19 percent. For example, in 2018 3,390 individuals were monitored using GPS devices compared to 4,144 individuals in 2022. This compares to the decrease from 3,369 individuals on radio frequency devices in 2018 to 2,745 individuals in 2022.[33]

Most Individuals Began Location Monitoring on Similar Charges but Generally Had No New Criminal Charges and Appeared When Ordered to Court

To understand which types of crimes might result in the court ordering an individual to location monitoring, we analyzed the Administrative Office's data on the most serious charge that individuals with court-ordered

[31]This represents 24,953 of 38,497 individuals who completed their court-ordered location monitoring. Our data set includes 43,989 individuals with court-ordered location monitoring from 2018 to 2022, of whom 5,495 had ongoing cases of supervision or had an indeterminate number of days of supervision and were excluded from this analysis.

[32]Some location monitoring technologies have limitations when used in certain areas, such as the lack of cellular towers or GPS satellite signal strength.

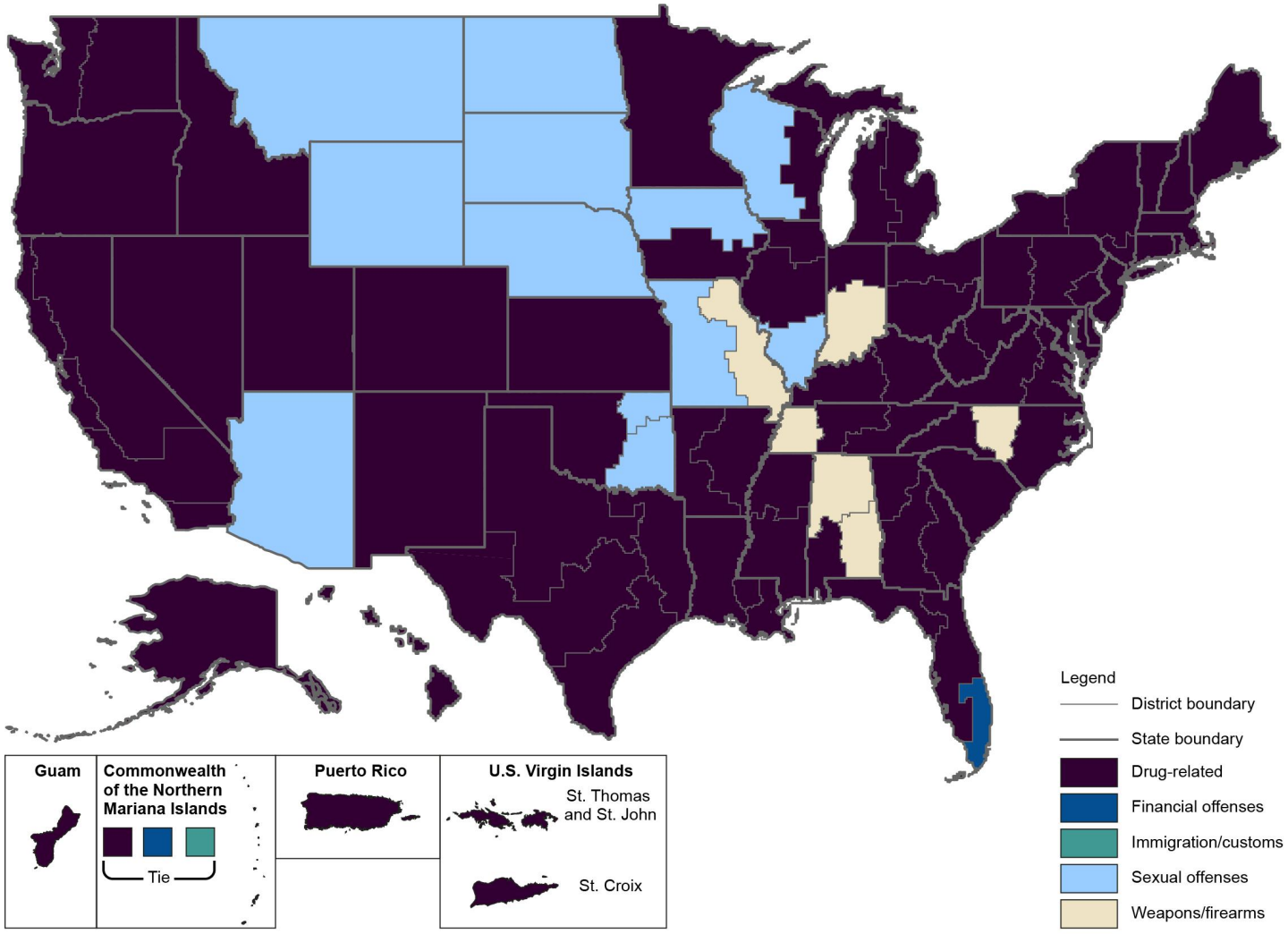
[33] These numbers exclude individuals who were monitored using a combination of GPS and radio frequency.

location monitoring were charged with between 2018 and 2022.[34] For each district, we found that the most common, most serious charge amongst these individuals was generally drug related, followed by sexual offenses (see fig. 5). During our interviews, some Assistant U.S. Attorneys told us there are no specific crimes or charges that will automatically confer a condition of location monitoring, as each case is considered on its own merits based on the facts and circumstances. However, generally, if an individual's case involves a victim who is a minor under certain specific criminal statutes, any release order is required to include a condition of electronic monitoring, along with other required conditions.[35]

[34]If an individual had both felony and misdemeanor charges, we selected the felony as their most serious charge. If an individual had only felonies or only misdemeanors, we selected the charge with the highest class as their most serious charge. In some cases, individuals were counted twice if their charges were of equal type (i.e. two felonies) and class (i.e. both class A). See 18 U.S.C. § 3581 for classification of felonies and misdemeanors.

[35]18 U.S.C. § 3142(c).

Figure 5: Most Common, Most Serious Charge amongst Individuals with Court-Ordered Location Monitoring, by Judicial District, Calendar Years 2018-2022



Source: GAO analysis of Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts data. | GAO-23-105873

The Administrative Office has several objectives for the pretrial location monitoring program: 1) to keep the community safe from further re-offenses by those awaiting trial; 2) to ensure individuals are appearing at their court dates at the appropriate time and place; and 3) to ensure individuals are complying with the imposed conditions as set by the judicial officer. The Administrative Office tracks data related to these objectives by assessing violations and new criminal charges, appearance rates in court, and instances of absconding. The Administrative Office

uses PACTS to monitor this data and maintains data on the demographics of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring.[36]

We found that a high percentage of these individuals met the Administrative Office's objectives between 2018 and 2022, as shown in figure 6 below. For example, nearly all individuals (98 percent) had zero instances of absconding from the location monitoring program. In addition, 92 percent had no new criminal charges during the 2018 to 2022 time period and 84 percent had zero instances of failing to appear in court when required.

Figure 6: Percentage of Individuals with Court-Ordered Location Monitoring that Met the Objectives the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts Tracks, Calendar Years 2018-2022

Source: GAO analysis of Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts data; GAO (illustrations). | GAO-23-105873

Note: Percentages in this figure represent 43,989 individuals with court-ordered location monitoring from 2018 to 2022. Our statistics are based on the number of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring during 2018-2022. This includes both new activations and those whose term of supervision overlapped with that period, even if it started prior to 2018 or ended after 2022.

[a]According to the Administrative Office's officials, an absconsion refers to instances where an individual does not report to the pretrial services office as directed.

[b]New criminal charges refer to instances where individuals receive a new criminal charge while assigned to location monitoring.

[c]Failing to appear in court refers to instances where individuals do not attend their required court proceedings.

Individuals with Court-Ordered Location Monitoring Experience Obstacles Related to Sustaining Employment and Navigating Changes to their Daily Schedules

Individuals with court-ordered location monitoring may experience obstacles. For example, they must request and receive approval for

[36]Officials from the Administrative Office told us in June 2023, that they are in the process of replacing their PACTS data system.

deviation from their regular schedule, such as work schedule changes or last-minute activity requests.

During our interviews in selected districts, federal defenders shared with us how these obstacles affected their clients. Two federal defenders told us about examples of their clients having to turn down opportunities for overtime at their places of employment. In particular, they explained that when such opportunities arose, their clients had to decline them because such deviations from a routine schedule require advance approval from the pretrial officer. It is not always possible to get such approval in real-time. In addition, federal defenders relayed that some companies may not hire these individuals at all because of monitoring-related scheduling restrictions and/or the visibility of the location monitoring device.

In addition, one federal defender explained that restrictions to schedule changes make caring for dependents challenging. For example, it is difficult for parents with court-ordered location monitoring to receive approval for schedule changes if their child misses the school bus. Further, one federal defender explained that since clients must request and receive approval to leave their home for grocery shopping, this pre-approval may also pose challenges. In particular, the defender explained a scenario where an individual returned home from a shopping trip but forgot an item. In these cases, individuals would have to contact their officers to request permission to leave again, and then wait for the officer to respond, verify that the request is legitimate, and approve the request.

Three federal defenders we spoke with noted that issues related to public transportation may also complicate an individual's experience on location monitoring. For example, individuals may arrive home past their curfew due to delays in public transportation or traffic. Officials from the Administrative Office told us these types of events are not considered violations, and individuals will often call or text their officer to make them aware of any delays.

Officers Reported Some Operational Challenges, but the Administrative Office Does

Not Fully Collect or Analyze Alert and Workload Data

Officers Encounter Challenges Related to Unique Case Needs and Equipment-Related Issues

Officers encounter operational challenges, such as managing individual case needs and addressing equipment-related challenges as they engage in location monitoring activities. Nearly all of the chiefs that responded to our survey (70 of the 79 chiefs) indicated that the job responsibilities for officers managing location monitoring cases, compared to officers not supervising location monitoring cases, increases an officer's overall workload.[37]

Managing individual case needs. Officers in three of our six selected districts reported that the efforts needed to manage individual needs complicates management of location monitoring cases. As previously mentioned in the report, judges make the decision on whether to release or detain an individual and whether to order them to location monitoring. The Administrative Office provides districts with resources and training materials that they can use to educate judges on the technology requirements and workload demands of location monitoring. However, most respondents (64 chiefs of the 79) indicated that, in the past year, judges assigning individuals to location monitoring that are not in circumstances for effective supervision (i.e., unstable housing or significant mental health conditions) is extremely or moderately challenging.[38] During our interviews, an officer in one district explained that officers sometimes supervise individuals experiencing homelessness or who have unstable housing. The officer supervised an individual who moved four times in a short period. For each relocation, policy requires the officer to conduct a field visit to assess the residence and ensure that the location monitoring equipment is compatible, increasing the workload for officers.

Another officer in a different district told us about an experience supervising an individual with an intellectual disability. The officer could

[37]See question 17 in appendix II for the full survey question. Five chiefs indicated that this had no effect and four indicated that this decreased officers' overall workload.

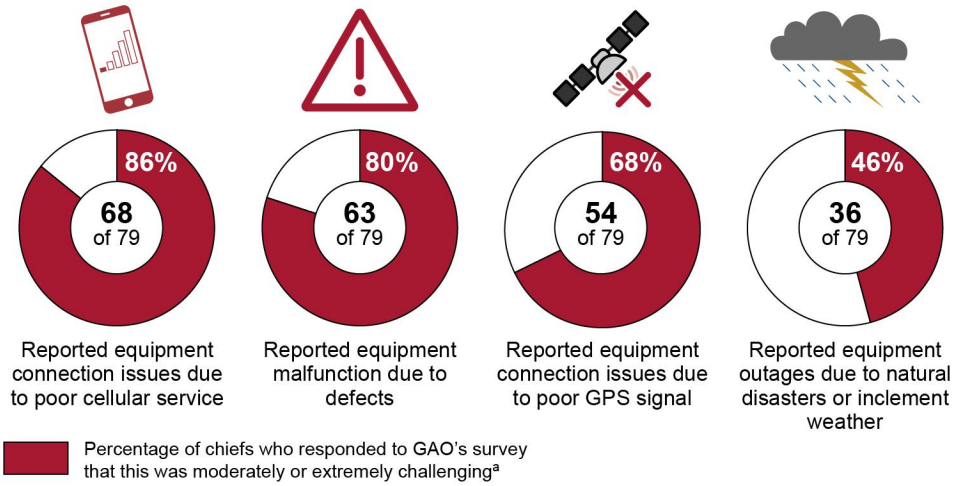
[38]See question 24 in appendix II for the full survey question. Eleven chiefs indicated that this is not challenging at all. Another two chiefs indicated this did not occur in their district, one chief was unsure, and one chief did not respond to this question.

not provide directions telling the individual to visit a city building to apply for certain benefits and assume these directions were sufficient. Rather, this individual required more hands-on help—both in terms of navigating to the building and managing the benefit application process—and directions alone were not enough. However, at the time, the officer's caseload was about 40 cases and the officer was not available to support the individual in this way. The officer told us that the federal defender's office eventually assigned the individual a social worker and therapist, but these resources are not easily available for all defendants with these circumstances due to similar constraints on the federal defender's capacity.

We asked the Administrative Office's officials to share with us any initiatives they had in place to address judges ordering individuals to location monitoring who are in circumstances that may not be conducive to effective supervision. They explained that while judges make the final decision on whether to order individuals to location monitoring, the Administrative Office provides all districts with resources and training materials to assist them with educating judges on when it may be best to order location monitoring. For example, the Administrative Office encourages districts to provide judges with an overview of location monitoring technology and makes handbooks and reference guides on location monitoring available to officers through their internal website.

Addressing equipment-related challenges. Officers and chiefs also reported encountering equipment-related challenges, often due to environmental issues, that affect their ability to manage caseloads. As figure 7 shows, chiefs who responded to our survey indicated experiencing location monitoring challenges related to poor cellular service, equipment malfunctions, poor GPS signal, or natural disaster or weather-related issues.

Figure 7: Number of Chiefs Reporting that Equipment-Related Challenges were Moderately or Extremely Challenging in their Districts within the Past Year



Source: GAO survey of Chief Pretrial Services Officers and Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officers; GAO (illustrations). | GAO-23-105873

Data for Figure 7: Number of Chiefs Reporting that Equipment-Related Challenges were Moderately or Extremely Challenging in their Districts within the Past Year

	Number of chiefs reporting	Percentage of chiefs who responded to GAO's survey that this was moderately or extremely challenging[a]
Reported equipment connection issues due to poor cellular service	68 of 79	86%
Reported equipment malfunction due to defects	63 of 79	80%
Reported equipment connection issues due to poor GPS signal	54 of 79	68%
Reported equipment outages due to natural disasters or inclement weather	36 of 79	46%

Source: GAO survey of Chief Pretrial Services Officers and Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officers; GAO (illustrations). | GAO-23-105873

[a]The survey asked chiefs: "In the past year, how challenging, if at all, have each of the following been for location monitoring in your district?" See question 23 in appendix II for the full survey question and response options.

Poor cellular service. Radio frequency devices require a connection to cellular towers or a telephone landline. GPS devices require GPS satellites, cellular towers, or Wi-Fi connection. Cellular connection issues may occur in rural or urban areas where equipment connection to cellular towers is more difficult. In our survey, nearly all respondents (68 of the 79 chiefs) indicated that equipment

connection issues due to poor cellular service is either moderately or extremely challenging in their district.[39] For example, one chief told us that because the district is in an urban area, certain types of buildings and the public transportation system make equipment connection to cellular service more difficult. When the cellular connection is poor, an individual's device may temporarily lose its connection to cellular service, which may cause alert notifications for the officers after a certain period.

Equipment malfunctions due to defects. Location monitoring equipment may experience malfunctions or defects over time. In our survey, most respondents (63 of 79 chiefs) indicated that equipment malfunctions due to defects are moderately or extremely challenging in their district.[40]

Poor GPS signal. Similar to cellular connection, GPS connection issues may occur in urban and rural areas based on environmental factors and building structures. In our survey, most respondents (54 of the 79 chiefs) indicated that equipment connection issues due to poor GPS signal are moderately or extremely challenging.[41] Additionally, five of six chiefs and officers in four of the six selected districts that we interviewed identified challenges related to location monitoring in certain geographic locations. One officer noted that sometimes GPS equipment may mistakenly report that an individual is out of range because of these issues. For these reasons, another officer noted it is crucial that officers have the ability to change an

[39]Eight chiefs indicated that this was not challenging, two indicated this did not occur in their district, and one was unsure.

[40]Fifteen chiefs indicated that this was not challenging and one was unsure.

[41]Fifteen chiefs indicated that this was not challenging, eight indicated this did not occur in their district, and two were unsure.

individual's type of location monitoring equipment to one that is a better fit.[42]

Natural disasters or inclement weather. Natural disasters or inclement weather may result in widespread power outages that affect location monitoring equipment and officers' ability to supervise individuals. In our survey, 36 of the 79 chiefs, or 46 percent, indicated that equipment outages due to natural disasters or inclement weather are moderately or extremely challenging in their district.[43] While less than half of the chiefs reported experiencing this, natural disasters or inclement weather can increase the workload for officers and result in additional challenges. For example, a chief in one district told us that severe freezing weather caused power outages and damages to the state's electrical grid. As a result, individuals across the state, including those with court-ordered location monitoring, lost electricity and were unable to charge their devices, causing them to eventually power down due to low batteries. To maintain contact with the individuals, officers conducted in-person visits in the severe weather and the district purchased power packs for officers so they could charge their devices and communicate with those in their caseload.

As a part of its contractual obligation to provide a quality control program, the Administrative Office's contractor has procedures in place to address the equipment functionality challenges mentioned above. Specifically, when a district experiences an issue with its equipment, the district is to send the equipment to the contractor for analysis. The contractor's assessment includes an examination of the equipment to determine the source of the failure, replacement of components to regain functionality, and testing to ensure that the issue is resolved. Both officials from the

[42]Judiciary policy states that, in certain cases, officers can request to change an individual's type of location monitoring equipment. These types of changes may help decrease officer workload. Officers we spoke with stated they may use this policy if an individual frequently experiences problems with their device or if the individual is in compliance with their condition for a certain length of time. For example, an officer may request that an individual be reassigned radio frequency instead of GPS, which is less restrictive and may produce fewer alerts, if the individual regularly appears to their court dates or follows their approved schedule. However, judges make the final decision of whether to approve the change in type of equipment so it may not always be a possible solution.

[43]Forty-one chiefs indicated that this was not challenging and two indicated this did not occur in their district.

Administrative Office and the contractor told us that upon further investigation of equipment, they usually learn that the equipment is completely functional but that the malfunction was a result of poor environmental conditions or installation errors.[44]

The Administrative Office also has procedures in place to address equipment malfunctions during natural disasters or inclement weather. Specifically, the Administrative Office has a national policy and emergency response team, which are designed to support the districts in the case of wide-spread outages. In its policy, the Administrative Office recommends that districts develop an emergency and disaster plan. It also gives chiefs the option to allow the Administrative Office staff (acting as an emergency response team) access to districts' data systems to help monitor individuals with court-ordered location monitoring during the emergency. The emergency response team may offer assistance remotely by making data entries for the officers so that the officers can focus on other activities. The team may also travel to the district to help in person. Team members may help locate or monitor individuals with court-ordered location monitoring (beginning with those that are high-risk, such as those charged with sex offense crimes). The team may also arrange for the individual to travel to a neighboring office or district to be reissued any necessary equipment.

Officers Encounter Challenges Related to the Demands of Alert Response

Our analysis of data over the last 5 years (2018 to 2022) showed that a little over half of alerts occurred during the day, while just under half occurred after regular work hours (i.e. after 6pm).[45] For example, out of 1.1 million alerts over the last 5 years, 56 percent occurred between the hours of 7am and 6pm, while 44 percent occurred between 6pm and 7am. Officers in all of the six districts we spoke with noted that managing location monitoring cases and responding to alerts is time intensive. In addition, four of six chiefs we spoke with stated that responding to alerts is a large part of the officers' location monitoring workload. Responding to location monitoring alerts includes responding to those that occur "after

[44]According to the contractor, the failure rate for GPS equipment returned to the contractor is 3.6 percent and 8.2 percent for radio frequency equipment returned to the contractor.

[45]For the purposes of our analysis, alerts that occurred between hours were coded as occurring on the hour. For example, alerts that occurred between 6:01 and 6:59am are reported as occurring in the 6am hour.

hours," and one officer shared how taxing this can be. Specifically, the officer told us that when receiving alerts in the middle of the night, officers lose sleep and may experience difficulty falling back asleep, even if able to quickly resolve the alert. Another officer told us about nights when alerts caused notifications every 2 hours, waking the officer up each time.

In each district, a standard alert process is in place for officers to follow, regardless of the time that it is received (see fig. 8). This process has specific steps and dictates a specific interval for many activities. Alerts can be categorized as "key alerts" or "non-key-alerts." Key alerts trigger when defendants do not comply with their conditions. For example, a device may trigger a key alert if the defendant tampers (i.e., tries to manipulate the device). Key alerts require officers to respond immediately to investigate the cause of the alert. Non-key alerts, such as those that staff in the monitoring call center resolve, may also require an investigation but not necessarily an immediate response.

Figure 8: Example of the Location Monitoring Alerts Process

Source: GAO analysis of Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts policy; GAO (illustrations). | GAO-23-105873

According to the Administrative Office's officials, officers do not receive additional pay for responding to alerts after hours. Specifically, pretrial and probation services officers are not eligible to receive a type of premium pay referred to as "availability pay" or Law Enforcement Availability Pay (LEAP) pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 5545a.[46] Three of the six chiefs that we spoke with stated that LEAP could serve as an incentive for

[46]The Law Enforcement Availability Pay Act of 1994, as amended, established a uniform compensation system for federal criminal investigators who, by the nature of their duties, are often required to work excessive and unusual hours. The purpose of LEAP is to provide premium pay to criminal investigators to ensure their availability for unscheduled work in excess of a 40-hour workweek based on the needs of the employing agency. The LEAP Act authorized a 25 percent increase in base salary (LEAP premium pay) as long as specific requirements of the LEAP Act are met. Among these requirements is a condition that criminal investigators maintain an annual average of two or more unscheduled duty hours per workday.

hiring and maintaining officers, if they were eligible to receive it. According to the Administrative Office, pretrial and probation services officers do not qualify for this type of premium pay because the the statutory provisions do not include judiciary personnel.

Officials told us that they have analyzed this pay authority and that expanding eligibility to its workforce would require a statutory change. According to an analysis the Administrative Office conducted in 2021, it would also cost an additional $135 million annually to cover the additional hours it estimated all staff are accruing. While the Administrative Office's officials told us that, in principle, they would support authority to cover availability pay or LEAP within the statutory provisions, in practice, expanding it has challenges. In particular, doing so would require either a substantial increase in annual discretionary appropriations or the redirection of critical funds from other judiciary activities and priorities, which they were not willing to risk.

The Administrative Office does have some initiatives in place to address the workload associated with responding to location monitoring alerts. For example, the contractor's software allows districts to select either a low-risk or standard alert notification protocol for individuals with court-ordered location monitoring. The goal is to provide workload relief to officers by extending the amount of time that officers have to investigate an alert and reserving the labor intensive task of more promptly responding to alerts for higher risk cases. For six types of schedule-related alerts, including instances where individuals fail to return to their residences within the approved timeframes, the officer is allowed an extended period to respond to and investigate alerts for individuals who pose no threat or harm to the community.

The Administrative Office Does Not Fully Collect or Analyze Alert and Workload Data to Understand Location Monitoring Challenges

The Administrative Office does not fully collect and analyze data on the underlying causes of location monitoring key alerts. Given this, the Administrative Office is unable to fully understand and compare trends across districts, to provide insight into the challenges and workload of the officers. This is because its existing data system, PACTS, does not contain a sortable data field that would facilitate this effort. In particular, as figure 8 illustrated, officers must enter text to summarize key alerts and the results of their investigation in the PACTS data system. The field where officers enter this text allows for free-form response rather than

compelling officers to choose from a drop down menu with pre-determined response categories. Thus, for the Administrative Office's officials to analyze data on underlying key alert causes, they would need to do manual searches of each narrative text field, which would be time and resource intensive—and which they are not doing currently.

Further, the Administrative Office has no assurance that the underlying cause of an alert is accurately recorded since officers may or may not go into detail in the narrative portion of the PACTS record when writing up the disposition of the key alert. Therefore, this portion may not contain critical facts about the case. Additionally, officers responding to the same types of key alerts might record the underlying cause differently, making it difficult to fully capture and analyze the nature of underlying causes. As a result, the Administrative Office is not positioned to conduct analysis via PACTS of any commonalities across the districts in what is really driving key alerts, and take corrective action, as necessary, to address them.

Officers told us that after responding to and investigating the key alert, they may learn that the alert was due to an equipment communication error, such as the individual's device mistakenly reporting that the individual is outside of their approved range of movement. Thus, what seemed like a violation was determined to be a device connection issue, such as poor cellular service due to environmental conditions. Officers may or may not go into such detail in the summary text portion of the PACTS record when writing up the disposition of the key alert, complicating any efforts to identify underlying causes.

Officials from the Administrative Office told us in June 2023 that they are in the process of replacing their PACTS data system. They plan to begin piloting the new system in six districts beginning in February 2024, and then fully implementing the system in fiscal year 2026. The Administrative Office's officials told us that among other features, the new data system will allow them to conduct key word searches of the narrative portion of the PACTS record.[47] Specific word searches may not reveal analyzable results because of the variation in the ways that officers may record information. Creating a sortable field with the option for "unknown" or "indeterminate" would help the Administrative Office quantify the extent to which particular causes were occurring or instances where classification

[47]The Administrative Office's officials stated that other planned features include enhanced security, better data storage, and improved technical capabilities. For example, the structure of their current data system sometimes causes duplicate entries if an individual is charged with crimes in different districts. The structure of the new system will prevent these types of duplicate entries from existing.

was not possible. However, the Administrative Office has no plans to include this field in the new data system.

In addition to not tracking the underlying cause of alerts, PACTS does not track how long it takes officers to respond to and investigate key alerts.[48] As a result, the Administrative Office is unable to quantify which key alerts take longer than others to respond to, how long on average any investigation of a key alert might take, or how much of an officers' time on duty is dedicated to alert response. Further, the Administrative Office does not have the benefit of this information when it examines workload data to determine necessary staffing levels at district offices.

The Administrative Office's Strategic Plan states that the Administrative Office should promote data-driven decision making by developing and enhancing analytics tools. Additionally, the Strategic Plan for the Federal Judiciary cites harnessing the potential of technology to identify and meet the needs of judiciary users for information, service, and access to the courts as a key strategy. This includes continuing to build, maintain, and continuously enhance robust and flexible technology systems. Further, standards for internal controls in the federal government state that management should use quality information to achieve the entity's objectives. This includes obtaining relevant data from reliable internal and external sources in a timely manner and processing that data into information (i.e., via analysis) that supports the internal control system.[49] Lastly, we have previously identified four key practices for human capital planning. These include incorporating work activities and the frequency and time required to conduct these activities into agency's staffing models and ensuring data quality to provide assurance that staffing estimates produced from the models are reliable.[50]

The Administrative Office's officials stated that there could be some utility in tracking the time to respond to and investigate key alerts, but they were concerned that adding this tracking to officers' workloads may cause additional burden. In addition, officials were concerned about variations in the length of time that might be reported, given that some districts are spread out geographically or have territory outside the contiguous U.S., and travel time alone could skew the data. While we understand these

[48]While not tracking time that officers spend responding to and investigating alerts, PACTS does track the length of time it takes officers to acknowledge they have received notification of an alert.

[49]GAO-14-704G.

[50]GAO-16-384.

concerns, we believe that by creating a sortable field in its new data system, the Administrative Office could gain greater insight into the underlying causes of location monitoring alerts, better differentiate between alerts caused by violations or other reasons, and identify any commonalities within or across districts. Further, the Administrative Office could use this information to take actions to address any recurring underlying causes. Moreover, by tracking the length of time that it takes officers to respond to and investigate alerts, the Administrative Office could then analyze this data to better understand workload demands, potentially reduce them, and use this information when making staffing decisions.

Conclusions

Location monitoring helps officers ensure that individuals comply with their release conditions while awaiting trial, yet chiefs and officers reported encountering a variety of operational challenges. The Administrative Office has taken some steps to mitigate these challenges, such as allowing officers to use a low-risk protocol to reduce workload, and developing an emergency response team to help in the case of natural disasters. Further, the Administrative Office contract includes the services of a monitoring call center which chiefs indicated reduces the work performed by their officers during non-traditional hours. However, the Administrative Office could benefit from capturing information on the underlying causes of location monitoring key alerts and the length of time that it takes officers to respond to and investigate such alerts. Though there are some practical considerations for the Administrative Office in making these changes in the data it collects, it could achieve some operational benefits associated with improved data collection, analysis, and application.

By creating a sortable data field in its new data system to track the underlying cause of key alerts, the Administrative Office can distinguish between alerts triggered by violations or equipment malfunctions, for example. This sortable field can also help the Administrative Office analyze commonalities in the underlying causes of key alerts and consider corrective action, as necessary, to address them. Further, by developing a method in its new data system to track the length of time that it takes location monitoring officers to respond to and investigate key alerts, the Administrative Office would be in a better position to make and inform workload and staffing decisions.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making four recommendations to the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts:

The Director of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts should ensure that the Probation and Pretrial Services Office, as it replaces its current PACTS data system, create a sortable field in its new data system that tracks the underlying cause of key alerts across districts. (Recommendation 1)

The Director of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts should ensure that the Probation and Pretrial Services Office analyzes the data in its newly created PACTS data system field for commonalities in the underlying causes of key alerts to inform corrective actions, as necessary to address them. (Recommendation 2)

The Director of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts should ensure that the Probation and Pretrial Services Office, as it replaces its current PACTS data system, develops a method in its new data system to track the length of time that it takes location monitoring officers to respond to and investigate key alerts and analyze these data. (Recommendation 3)

The Director of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts should ensure that the Probation and Pretrial Services Office takes steps to incorporate what it learns about the length of time location monitoring officers take to respond to and investigate key alerts into its workload analysis and use this information when making staffing decisions. (Recommendation 4)

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this product to the Administrative Office and the Department of Justice for comment. Both agencies provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. The Administrative Office also provided written comments, which are reproduced in appendix III. The Administrative Office did not agree or disagree with the four recommendations we directed to it but stated that it will assess whether adding the recommended data elements will provide actionable data to improve program management. Specifically, the Administrative Office stated that it will assess whether adding the recommended data will improve program management once the current PACTS system for case management has been replaced.

The Administrative Office stated that its next generation case management system will have the capability to derive useable data from unstructured text (e.g., from the chronological narrative records that officers maintain on a case). It also noted that a solution that allows the Administrative Office to collect and analyze the suggested data while reducing duplicate data entry (i.e., once in the chronological record and once in a "sortable field") may be a preferred way to proceed. However, as described in our report, a solution relying on unstructured text may not reveal analyzable results because of the variation in the ways that officers may record narrative information. If quality data that accounts for these variations and is broadly analyzable can be garnered from this method of collection, this solution may address the intent of our recommendations.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Director of the Administrative Office, the Department of Justice and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at https://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or GoodwinG@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Gretta L. Goodwin
Director, Homeland Security and Justice

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

We were asked to review the number and types of federal crimes that pretrial defendants were charged with over the past 5 years, policies that guide Pretrial Services officers in their response to tampering or noncompliance with release conditions, steps the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (the Administrative Office) has taken to ensure officers are adhering to policies, and any staffing and resource challenges that officers face. This report addresses: (1) how federal pretrial monitoring activities are overseen and implemented, (2) how the Administrative Office manages the use of location monitoring devices and assesses district adherence to its location monitoring policies, (3) characteristics of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring and obstacles they experience, and (4) the type of challenges officers encounter when supervising those with court-ordered location monitoring and the extent to which the Administrative Office has initiatives in place to address any challenges.

To address all four objectives, we interviewed Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officers, officers, and other relevant stakeholders, such as Assistant U.S. Attorneys and federal public defenders, in six selected districts.[1] We selected districts to ensure a mix of district types and sizes based on the number of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring, the most common types of crimes associated with pretrial individuals, size of metropolitan area, and the number of location monitoring cases per officer. The results of our interviews are not generalizable but they provided context and insight into specific experiences of the chiefs, officers, and stakeholders in those districts.

To describe how federal pretrial monitoring activities are overseen and implemented, we also reviewed relevant policy documents and the Administrative Office guidance, such as the Guide to Judiciary Policy, the Location Monitoring Procedures Manual, and the Administrative Office training requirements for staff.

To examine how the Administrative Office manages the use of location monitoring devices and its efforts to ensure districts are adhering to its location monitoring policies, we also reviewed the Administrative Office's

[1]We were able to speak with a federal defender in five of the six selected districts.

contract with the provider of monitoring devices and spoke with contractor representatives to get their perspectives on the contract requirements and implementation. Further, we reviewed the Administrative Office's 5-year review results from its monitoring efforts to understand deficiencies it found across districts specific to location monitoring. Additionally, we sent an electronic survey to all 93 chiefs to gain their perspectives on district efforts to adhere to the Administrative Office's policy. Of the 93 chiefs who were sent the survey, 79 responded, yielding an 85 percent response rate.

We used the information gathered from chief and officer interviews in six selected districts to inform our survey questions for chief probation and pretrial services officers. We developed a survey to gather information on chiefs' perspectives on location monitoring policies, training, stakeholder relationships, and challenges in the judicial districts. Prior to deploying our survey, we pretested it with three individuals who had pretrial services experience to ensure that (1) the questions were clear and unambiguous, (2) the terminology was used correctly, (3) the survey did not place an undue burden on officers, (4) the information could feasibly be obtained, and (5) the survey was comprehensive and unbiased. We also provided a copy of the survey instrument to the Administrative Office for a technical review. The process of developing the survey was iterative, in that we used the results of our pretests and comments from the Administrative Office's technical review to modify the survey. We also had our survey instrument peer reviewed by an independent GAO survey specialist and made modifications based upon their recommendations prior to launching the survey.

We created individual electronic survey links for all 93 current chief probation and pretrial services officers in the judicial districts and collected survey responses from February 24, 2023 through March 20, 2023. The Administrative Office sent the initiation email (including an attachment with the individualized survey links) and follow-up reminder emails on GAO's behalf.[2] We also extended the survey past our original deadline of Friday, March 10, 2023 in an effort to increase the response

[2]We did not have access to individual Administrative Office staff e-mail addresses. As a workaround, GAO created 93 individual Qualtrics survey links (one for each chief) and included an embedded variable intended to ensure the correct districts were responding to the correct survey links. The Administrative Office agreed to send the initiation email with links and follow-up emails, drafted by GAO, to the 93 chiefs on GAO's behalf and provide GAO with confirmation that the survey correspondence had been sent to the intended population.

rate. Of the 93 chiefs that were sent the survey, 79 responded prior to our extended deadline, yielding an 85 percent response rate.[3]

To help characterize respondent data in this report, we use modifiers (e.g., “most” and “several”) to quantify the views of the 79 chiefs who completed our survey. We define these modifiers as follows: (1) “nearly all” chiefs represents 67 or more chiefs (which is approximately 85 percent or more of respondents) (2) “most” chiefs represents between 40 and 66 chiefs (which is between approximately 50 and 84 percent of the respondents); (3) “many” chiefs represents 16 to 39 officers (which is between approximately 20 and 49 percent of respondents); (4) “some” chiefs represents 15 or less chiefs (which is approximately less than 20 percent of respondents). However, in many places throughout the report, we also provide the specific number of respondents. We use these same modifiers to describe the results of our data analysis.

To describe characteristics of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring, we also analyzed the Administrative Office’s location monitoring data over the last 5 calendar years (2018 to 2022). Specifically, we analyzed demographics data and the number of individuals with court-ordered location monitoring who failed to appear in court, absconded from monitoring, or received new charges.[4] We assessed the reliability of the data by reviewing data documentation, interviewing knowledgeable officials and conducting electronic testing to identify missing values, outliers, or other obvious errors. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of reporting the characteristics of those with court-ordered location monitoring. To describe the obstacles individuals with court-ordered location monitoring experience, we interviewed federal defenders to obtain their perspectives on challenges these individuals experience.

To understand the challenges that officers supervising individuals with court-ordered location monitoring encountered, we also analyzed data from the Administrative Office on the volume and characteristics of location monitoring alerts to help us further understand the workload for location monitoring officers. To determine the extent to which the Administrative Office has initiatives in place to address challenges, we reviewed our survey responses and asked the Administrative Office’s

[3]We received responses from two Chiefs after March 20, 2023, which was after the survey officially closed. We did not include their responses in our analysis or our response rate calculation.

[4]According to Administrative Office’s officials, an absconsion refers to instances where an individual does not report to the pretrial services office as directed.

officials responsible for overseeing the districts and the location monitoring program about any efforts in place to address identified challenges. We reviewed agency responses and documents, including the Administrative Office's Location Monitoring Procedures Manual, for information on their policies in place. Further, in assessing the extent to which the Administrative Office had initiatives in place to address challenges, we specifically assessed the agency's processes for analyzing the underlying cause of location monitoring alerts aligned with the agency's strategic plan. This plan calls for promoting data-driven decision making by developing and enhancing analytics tools. We also assessed these processes against our criteria on internal controls—specifically that management should use quality information to achieve the entity's objectives.[5] Additionally, we assessed the agency's efforts to measure the workload associated with responding to location monitoring alerts against our criteria on human capital planning, and the Federal Judiciary's Strategic Plan, which cites harnessing the potential of technology to identify and meet the needs of judiciary users as a key strategy.[6]

We conducted this performance audit from March 2022 to September 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

[5]See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO-14-704G (Washington, D.C.: September 2014); Pub L. No. 115-334, § 4207, 132 Stat. at 4666-67 and Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, Strategic Direction for the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (Washington, D.C.: April 2022).

[6]See GAO, *Federal Protective Service: Enhancements to Performance Measures and Data Quality Processes Could Improve Human Capital Planning*, GAO-16-384 (Washington, D.C.: March, 24, 2016) and Judicial Conference of the United States, Strategic Plan for the Federal Judiciary (Washington, D.C.: September 2020).

Appendix II: Copy of the GAO Survey of U.S. Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officers

District Check: This survey is intended for district (embedded variable to confirm district name)[1]

If this is your district, please click on the forward arrow below.

If this is **NOT** your district, please exit this survey and revisit the Excel spreadsheet to find your district's correct survey link.

Survey Introduction: The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) is an independent, non-partisan agency that provides Congress, the heads of executive agencies, and the public with timely, fact-based, non-partisan information that can be used to improve government and save taxpayers billions of dollars. Our work is done at the request of congressional committees or subcommittees or is statutorily required by public laws or committee reports, per our Congressional Protocols. For more information on GAO, please visit www.gao.gov.

Congress has asked GAO to examine the policies and procedures of the federal probation and pretrial services system that guide district offices in their work, with an emphasis on using location monitoring to supervise defendants in pretrial status.

As part of our examination of the system, we are surveying Chief Pretrial Services Officers or Chief Probation Officers (if offices are combined) in each judicial district. The survey addresses: (1) your district-specific pretrial location monitoring policies and practices, (2) perspectives on training available to officers and other stakeholders, and (3) experiences managing location monitoring cases.

Your response to this survey is critical in our effort to provide Congress with the most complete and accurate information on pretrial release

[1]We used an embedded variable that displayed the district's name when the respondent opened their assigned link. The purpose of this was to confirm that respondents opened the correct link and completed the survey for the correct district.

location monitoring across the country. Please respond to our survey by Monday, March 20, 2023 to ensure your responses will be included in our report to Congress.

We anticipate that it will take you about 15 minutes to complete this survey. If you encounter any technical difficulties responding to this survey, please contact us at and identify yourself by your district name. Please note that we do not have your name or email address and the district name will be required to resolve any technical issues you encounter with your individual survey link.

Please know that we are not associated with PPSO or AO and that we will present the aggregate results of this survey in our report to Congress. Although in some cases individual survey responses may be discussed, the report will not include any information that could be used to identify individual respondents. Identifying information will be kept confidential and will not be released outside GAO, unless compelled by law or pursuant to a Congressional request.

Thank you in advance for responding to our survey.

Sincerely,

Gretta L. Goodwin
Director, Homeland Security and Justice
U.S. Government Accountability Office

District Identification

Q1 Within which district do you currently serve as the Chief Pretrial Services Officer or Chief Probation Officer (if offices are combined)?

▼ Alabama Middle (1) ... Wyoming (93)

Section Introduction: *The questions in this section of the survey are related to your district's current pretrial location monitoring policies, guidance, and practices.*

District-Specific Location Monitoring Policies, Guidance, and Practices

Q2 Does your district engage in the practices below (regardless of whether or not each is included in formal policy or guidance)?

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Unsure or I do not know (3)
Assigning defendants district-specific requirements that are included in monitoring agreements but are not specifically set by the court, (i.e., district-wide curfews or alcohol monitoring) (1)	○	○	○

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Unsure or I do not know (3)
Establishing district-specific protocols (in addition to national policies and procedures) for officers to follow when responding to key-alerts (2)	○	○	○
Recommending to the judge specific modifications to the type of location monitoring equipment used when a defendant is in compliance for a set period of time (e.g., changing a defendant from GPS to RF or RF to no equipment following a set period of compliance) (3)	○	○	○

Q3 In your district, in addition to completing the Pretrial Risk Assessment (PTRA), are officers required or encouraged to submit the PTRA or PTRA score to the judge prior to the judicial decision on release?

○ Officers are **required** to submit the PTRA or PTRA score. (1)

○ Officers are **encouraged, but not required**, to submit the PTRA or PTRA score. (2)

○ Officers are neither required, nor encouraged, to submit the PTRA or PTRA score. (3)

○ Unsure or I do not know (4)

Q4 What, if any, other district-specific location monitoring practices (regardless of whether or not they are included in formal policy or guidance) does your district engage in that were not listed in the previous questions?

Note: If your district does not have any other practices please type "none" below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q5 Does your district use the monitoring call center, also known as Agency Assist, for assistance handling alerts?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Unsure or I do not know (3)

Display This Question:

If Does your district use the monitoring call center, also known as Agency Assist, for assistance ha... = Yes

Q5a What, if any, effect does the use of the monitoring call center have on the work performed by officers during non-traditional hours (e.g., nights, weekends, holidays)?

○ Significantly reduces the amount of work performed during non-traditional hours (1)

○ Somewhat reduces the amount of work performed during non-traditional hours (2)

○ No effect on the amount of work performed during non-traditional hours (3)

○ Somewhat increases the amount of work performed during non-traditional hours (4)

○ Significantly increases the amount of work performed during non-traditional hours (5)

○ Unsure or I do not know (6)

Q6 Other than the five-year cyclical reviews that AO conducts to assess how well districts are complying with pretrial policies and procedures, does your district conduct a similar internal compliance review (self-assessment) that includes location monitoring policies and practices?

○ Yes (2)

○ No (1)

○ Unsure or I do not know (3)

Display This Question:

If Other than the five-year cyclical reviews that AO conducts to assess how well districts are compl... = Yes

Q6a How often does your district conduct these internal compliance reviews (self-assessments)?

○ Multiple times a year (1)

○ Once a year (2)

○ Once every two years (3)

○ At least once within the five-year cycle (4)

Display This Question:

If Other than the five-year cyclical reviews that AO conducts to assess how well districts are compl... = Yes

Q6b Were changes made to location monitoring policies and/or practices as a result of findings from the last internal compliance review?

○ Yes (4)

○ No (5)

○ Unsure or I do not know (6)

Display This Question:

If Were changes made to location monitoring policies and/or practices as a result of findings from t... = Yes

Q6c What specific changes were made to location monitoring polices and/or practices as a result of findings from the last internal compliance review?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Pretrial Location Monitoring Training

Section Introduction: The questions in this section ask about training related to pretrial location monitoring. We ask about various types of training which may or may not be offered to officers in your specific district. We also ask a series of questions about any location monitoring training your office provides to Assistant U.S. Attorneys, federal defenders (or defense attorneys), and judicial officials within your district.

Q7 Approximately what percentage of all pretrial services officers in your district are currently certified by the AO Annual Location Monitoring Certification Exam?

Note: Please note that we are asking about all of your current pretrial services officers, not just those currently assigned to location monitoring cases.

○ 25% or less (1)

○ At least 25% but less than 50% (2)

○ At least 50% but less than 75% (3)

○ At least 75% but less than 100% (4)

○ 100% (5)

○ Unsure or I do not know (6)

Q8 As a means of meeting case load demand, does your district require location monitoring certification for pretrial services officers other than those whose primary responsibility is location monitoring?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Unsure or I do not know (3)

Q9 Inclusive of national and district-level training, how sufficient is the training that the officers in your district receive in the areas below?

	This training is not offered (1)	Training offered is insufficient (2)	Training offered is moderately sufficient (3)	Training offered is sufficient (4)	Unsure or I do not know (5)
To improve officers' understanding of policies and procedures for location monitoring supervision (1)	○	○	○	○	○
To improve timeliness when responding to location monitoring alerts (2)	○	○	○	○	○
To work with defendants on location monitoring who have mental health conditions (3)	○	○	○	○	○
To learn about trauma-informed practices when working with defendants on location monitoring (4)	○	○	○	○	○

	This training is not offered (1)	Training offered is insufficient (2)	Training offered is moderately sufficient (3)	Training offered is sufficient (4)	Unsure or I do not know (5)
To gain understanding about connecting defendants on location monitoring to social services (5)	○	○	○	○	○
To gain knowledge about self-care or wellness for location monitoring officers (6)	○	○	○	○	○

Q10 What, if any, barriers prevent the types of training listed in the previous question from being sufficient in your district?

Note: If there are not any barriers that prevent the types of training listed in the previous question from being sufficient in your district please type "No barriers" in the space below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Note: The next set of questions asks about any pretrial location monitoring training that your office provides to judicial stakeholders. Please note that we will be asking you the same set of questions for each of the following judicial stakeholders: (1) Assistant U.S. Attorneys, (2) federal defenders (or defense attorneys), and (3) judicial officers. We are also interested in both formal and informal training that your district offers to these stakeholders.

Q11 Does your office provide location monitoring training to ***Assistant U.S. Attorneys***?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Unsure or I do not know (3)

Q11a On average, how frequently does your office provide location monitoring training to ***Assistant U.S. Attorneys***?

- ○ Monthly or more frequently (1)
- ○ Quarterly (2)
- ○ Twice a year (3)
- ○ Once a year (4)
- ○ Less frequently than once a year (5)
- ○ Never (6)

Q12 To what extent, if at all, does your office have sufficient resources required to provide location monitoring training to ***Assistant U.S. Attorneys***?

- ○ My office has insufficient resources to provide this training. (1)
- ○ My office has moderately sufficient resources to provide this training. (2)
- ○ My office has sufficient resources to provide this training. (3)
- ○ Unsure or I do not know (4)

Q13 Does your office provide location monitoring training to ***federal defenders*** (or defense attorneys)?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Unsure or I do not know (3)

Display This Question:

If Does your office provide location monitoring training to federal defenders (or defense attorneys)? = Yes

Q13a On average, how frequently does your office provide location monitoring training to ***federal defenders*** (or defense attorneys)?

- ○ Monthly or more frequently (1)

- ○ Quarterly (2)
- ○ Twice a year (3)
- ○ Once a year (4)
- ○ Less frequently than once a year (5)
- ○ Never (6)

Q14 To what extent, if at all, does your office have sufficient resources required to provide location monitoring training to ***federal defenders*** (or defense attorneys)?

- ○ My office has insufficient resources to provide this training. (1)
- ○ My office has moderately sufficient resources to provide this training. (2)
- ○ My office has sufficient resources to provide this training. (3)
- ○ Unsure or I do not know (4)

Q15 Does your office provide location monitoring training to ***judicial officers***?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Unsure or I do not know (3)

Display This Question:

If Does your office provide location monitoring training to judicial officers? = Yes

Q15a On average, how frequently does your office provide location monitoring training to ***judicial officers***?

- ○ Monthly or more frequently (1)
- ○ Quarterly (2)
- ○ Twice a year (3)

○ Once a year (4)

○ Less frequently than once a year (5)

○ Never (6)

Q16 To what extent, if at all, does your office have sufficient resources required to provide location monitoring training ***to judicial officers***?

○ My office has insufficient resources to provide this training. (1)

○ My office has moderately sufficient resources to provide this training. (2)

○ My office has sufficient resources to provide this training. (3)

○ Unsure or I do not know (4)

District Level Experiences Associated with Location Monitoring

Intro: The questions in this section ask about your district's experiences managing pretrial location monitoring cases. Except where otherwise noted these questions are asking you about your experiences within the past year.

Q17 Compared to officers who do not manage location monitoring cases, what impact, if any, do the job responsibilities for managing location monitoring cases have on officers' overall workload?

○ Managing location monitoring cases decreases officers' overall workload (1)

○ Managing location monitoring cases has no impact on officers' overall workload (2)

○ Managing location monitoring cases increases officers' overall workload (3)

○ Unsure or I do not know (4)

Q18 Compared to officers who do not manage location monitoring cases, what, if any, impact do the job requirements for managing location monitoring cases have on officer retention?

Definitions:
Decreases officer retention means it is more difficult to retain officers.
Increases officer retention means it is easier to retain officers.

○ Managing location monitoring cases decreases officer retention (1)

○ Managing location monitoring cases has no impact on officer retention (2)

○ Managing location monitoring cases increases officer retention (3)

○ Unsure or I do not know (4)

Q19 Compared to officers who do not manage location monitoring cases, what impact, if any, do the job requirements for managing location monitoring cases have on officers' work-life balance?

Note: Please answer this question to the best of your knowledge.

○ Managing location monitoring cases decreases officers' work-life balance (1)

○ Managing location monitoring cases has no impact on officers' work-life balance (2)

○ Managing location monitoring cases increases officers' work-life balance (3)

○ Unsure or I do not know (4)

Q20 *Over the past five years (including the current year)*, do you believe your district has had a sufficient number of **authorized** positions to manage the current workload of location monitoring cases?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Unsure or I do not know (3)

Q21 *Over the past five years (including the current year),* do you believe your district has had a sufficient number of **filled** positions to manage the current workload of location monitoring cases?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Unsure or I do not know (3)

Q22 *What, if any, challenges have you experienced filling positions* to manage the current workload of location monitoring cases in your district?

_____

_____

_____

Q23 *In the past year*, how challenging, if at all, have each of the following been for location monitoring in your district?

	This does not apply or did not occur in my district (1)	Not challenging at all (2)	Moderately challenging (3)	Extremely challenging (4)	Unsure or I do not know (5)
Equipment connection issues due to poor cellular service (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Equipment connection issues due to poor GPS signal (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Equipment malfunction due to defects (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Equipment outages or disruptions due to natural disasters or inclement weather (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Equipment tampering (5)	○	○	○	○	○

Q24 *In the past year*, how challenging, if at all, have each of the following been for location monitoring in your district?

	This does not apply or did not occur in my district (1)	Not challenging at all (2)	Moderately challenging (3)	Extremely challenging (4)	Unsure or I do not know (5)
The limited amount of time that officers have to complete the Pretrial Risk Assessment (PTRA) prior to the defendant's initial appearance (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The excessive amount of time supervisors must spend reviewing officer compliance with policy (2)	○	○	○	○	○

	This does not apply or did not occur in my district (1)	Not challenging at all (2)	Moderately challenging (3)	Extremely challenging (4)	Unsure or I do not know (5)
The limited amount of time that officers have to complete training on mental health conditions (3)	○	○	○	○	○
The limited amount of time that officers have available to provide social services to defendants while they are on location monitoring (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Judicial officers assigning defendants to location monitoring despite circumstances that may pose challenges for effective location monitoring supervision (e.g., unstable housing, significant mental health conditions) (6)	○	○	○	○	○

Q25 In the past year, what additional challenges, if any, have you experienced with location monitoring in your district?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q26 How sufficient, if at all, is your current budget allocation for the following aspects of location monitoring in your district?

	Not sufficient at all (1)	Moderately sufficient (2)	Extremely sufficient (3)	Unsure or I do not know (4)
To adequately staff the pretrial services office (1)	○	○	○	○

	Not sufficient at all (1)	Moderately sufficient (2)	Extremely sufficient (3)	Unsure or I do not know (4)
To hire officers to manage location monitoring cases (2)	○	○	○	○
To offer incentives to retain officers that manage location monitoring cases (3)	○	○	○	○
To provide training opportunities to location monitoring officers (4)	○	○	○	○

Q27 Is there anything else you would like us to know about location monitoring in your district or system-wide that we did not ask about in our survey?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix III: Comments from the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE
UNITED STATES COURTS

LEE ANN BENNETT
Deputy Director

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20544

September 8, 2023

Ms. Gretta L. Goodwin
Director, Homeland Security and Justice
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Goodwin:

The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AO) has received and reviewed the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) draft report *Pretrial Supervision: Actions Needed to Enhance Management of Location Monitoring Program* (GAO-23-105873) and appreciate the recommendations. The Federal Judiciary is always open to potential improvements that may complement the Judicial Branch's internal policies, procedures, and systems to effectively manage its programs.

The Judiciary's Management of the Pretrial Location Monitoring Program

The location monitoring program is a critical component of pretrial services supervision. District courts have the authority to issue an order of release or detention pending trial to persons charged with an offense. Under 18 U.S.C. § 3142(g), judges must consider several factors when determining whether there are conditions of release that will reasonably assure the required courtroom appearance of the person charged with an offense, the safety of other persons and the community, and balance those with the goals of the Bail Reform Act to avoid unnecessary pretrial detention. One condition of release that may be appropriate is location monitoring, which offers a cost-effective option to allow defendants to remain in their communities, under close supervision of a probation or pretrial services officer, pending their trial and sentence.[1] Despite its complexities and multidimensional nature – involving technology, human capital, and a deep understanding of human behavior – the Judiciary's location monitoring program is successful in achieving its desired outcomes.

[1] Based on the most recent data available, the average cost of pretrial detention is $3,224 per month, while the average cost of pretrial services supervision is $370 per month.

- As GAO's report reflects, nearly all individuals on pretrial services location monitoring (98 percent) "had zero instances of absconding from the location monitoring program. In addition, 92 percent had no new criminal charges during the 2018 to 2022 time period and 84 percent had zero instances of failing to appear in court as required."

- As part of its study, GAO administered a survey to all pretrial services office chiefs. Nearly all the respondents (74 of 75) indicated that the national location monitoring call center implemented by the AO either "somewhat or significantly" reduces work performed by probation and pretrial services officers during non-traditional hours. The call center was established by the AO in 2020 following an internal data analysis of key alerts, event investigations, and telephone recordings during a pilot study, and regular engagement with the probation and pretrial services staff who supervise these cases.

- The Judiciary has developed extensive policies and procedures to direct the proper management and oversight of the location monitoring program. The GAO survey asked pretrial services office chiefs about the training officers receive from the AO and its vendor, and nearly all the respondents (77 out of 78) indicated that the training is either "sufficient or moderately sufficient to understand location monitoring policies."

- The effectiveness of location monitoring is influenced by several external factors, including geography and weather. GAO's report acknowledges that service disruptions can arise during and after natural disasters or inclement weather, and that the AO has procedures in place to assist the courts when this occurs.

- GAO interviewed officers and chiefs in select districts, and the report reflects their view that the AO's location monitoring administrator "serves as a resource in their districts for questions on location monitoring equipment." Additionally, the AO routinely reviews the work of probation and pretrial services offices and makes findings and recommendations about the management and operations of the districts' location monitoring programs, and compliance with national policies and procedures. In addition to review findings, the AO collects and analyzes extensive data from its PACTS[2] case management system and other sources to refine policies, procedures, systems, and trainings.

[2] "PACTS" stands for Probation/Pretrial Services Automated Case Tracking System.

Ms. Gretta L. Goodwin
Page 3

It is noteworthy that GAO's study focused on a period of time (2018-2022) that included the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemic-related issues – including supply chain disruptions, staffing shortages, and heightened risks to the health and safety of pretrial detainees – all had significant impacts on the location monitoring program. For example, GAO's report cites an increase in the number of defendants placed on GPS monitoring during this period and that this form of monitoring is the "most restrictive type of device." It is important to note that this trend was influenced by an increase in the number of defendants placed on pretrial services location monitoring and shortages of other, less restrictive, monitoring devices, such as radio frequency devices. Many of the challenges placed on probation and pretrial services staff associated with the increase in GPS cases were overcome by the end of the pandemic and the restoration of the supply chain. Regardless of the type of monitoring technology used, the court-ordered component (e.g., curfew, home detention, home incarceration) drives the level of restriction.

GAO's report also notes that "[i]ndividuals with court-ordered location monitoring may experience obstacles." It should be noted that while location monitoring is an alternative to detention, it is ordered when the court determines it is the least restrictive condition to reasonably assure the appearance of the person as required and the safety of any other person or the community if the defendant is released. Although location monitoring affords defendants greater liberty than detained people, it is inherently restrictive. That said, the Judiciary is routinely examining strategies to minimize placing unnecessary obstacles on the lives of defendants. Recent strategies include authorizing, in appropriate cases, "virtual" contacts[3] with probation and pretrial services officers. Another innovation is the national deployment of a new scheduling client-based vendor mobile application in October 2022 that allows defendants to submit requests for schedule changes on their smartphones and, once submitted, notify the officer of the requested change to an officer-based vendor mobile application. This technology advancement allows for prompt schedule approval and immediate, accurate documentation. Additionally, defendants may view their approved schedule, send messages to their officer, and submit leave verifications (e.g., documents, photos) within the mobile application.

The report indicates service disruptions due to inclement weather or challenging environmental factors (e.g., GPS and/or cellular signals) may occur and create "equipment outages" or "GPS equipment may mistakenly report that an individual is out of range." It is important to note that in both situations, location monitoring equipment remains fully operational and continues to collect monitoring data (e.g., tamper status, in/out range). While the communications between the location monitoring device and the

[3] These may rely on using some form of video technology to replace certain in-person visits.

data center may be temporarily delayed, once communication is restored, monitoring data will be received by the data center.

The location monitoring administrator provides national program oversight vital to the success of the program. GAO's report states that "the administrator receives monthly reports on alert statistics, such as the number of alerts in each category." This understates the critical role of the location monitoring administrator, who reviews detailed monthly monitoring reports containing each type of key alert produced by GPS and radio frequency (RF) monitoring devices and the times these alerts are received. Each district's figures are compared to national averages, and the administrator carefully analyzes all unusual patterns of key alerts to determine the underlying cause (e.g., officer training deficiency, defendant behaviors, environmental factors, equipment malfunctions). Historically, most key alerts are related to defendants' behaviors, not equipment issues or officer errors.

GAO's Recommendations

The draft report recommends that the AO capture additional data and use that data to (1) determine "commonalities in the underlying causes of key alerts to inform corrective actions" and (2) take steps to incorporate the data on the length of time it takes to respond to and investigate key alerts into its workload analysis and use this information when making staffing decisions. As noted above, the AO already analyzes and uses extensive data in the management and oversight of the location monitoring program. The AO will assess whether adding the recommended data elements will provide actionable data to improve program management. As the draft report notes, it would be best to consider implementing this change once the current PACTS system has been replaced.

As AO staff previously noted, the potential impact on the data-entry demands of probation and pretrial services staff will be a consideration for any decision to modify the data. During its interviews with officers and chiefs, GAO heard widespread concerns related to officer workload and wellness, and the report recommendations would require the balance of additional data tracking with workload considerations. The first recommendation calls for the creation of a "sortable field" to track the underlying cause of key alerts. The AO's next generation case management system will have the capability to derive useable data from unstructured text (e.g., from the chronological narrative records that officers maintain on a case). A solution that allows the AO to collect and analyze the suggested data while reducing duplicate data entry (i.e., once in the chronological record and once in a "sortable field") may be a preferred way to proceed.

Conclusion

The Judiciary's location monitoring program is a critical and complex component of pretrial services supervision. The success of the program contributes to the administration of justice and the safety of communities. The draft report highlights several ways the AO effectively manages the program, and the report documents the outcomes achieved. The AO will continue its efforts to promote efficiencies and effectiveness in the location monitoring program. The AO appreciates the recommendations made by the GAO and will consider them as part of the Judiciary's ongoing efforts.

Sincerely,

Lee Ann Bennett

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Text for Appendix III: Comments from the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts

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Sincerely,

Lee Ann Bennett
Deputy Director

Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgements

GAO Contact:

Gretta L. Goodwin, 202-512-8777 or goodwing@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgements:

In addition to the contact named above, Joy A. Booth (Assistant Director), Ryan Lester (Analyst in Charge), Breana Stevens, Elizabeth Dretsch, Billy Commons, Dominick Dale, Eric Hauswirth, James Holley, Christoph Hoashi-Erhardt, and Sarah Hay made key contributions to this report. Adam Vogt, Jennifer Dougherty, Douglas Clifton Jr., Steven Lozano, Hai Tran, Richard Hung, and Miguel Cortez provided essential support.

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