

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106985](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Domestic and child abuse can result in devastating consequences for military service members and their families. It also can reduce mission readiness. In fiscal year 2023, DOD recorded 26,978 reports of domestic and child abuse incidents, of which 14,110 met the DOD definition of abuse.

House Report 117-397 includes a provision for GAO to review the policies and regulations governing IDCs and the use of decision notification letters. This report (1) describes how military commanders, abuse victims, and alleged abusers may use IDC decisions; and (2) assesses the extent to which the military services have established processes to notify commanders, abuse victims, and alleged abusers of IDC decisions.

GAO conducted site visits at four military installations; analyzed random samples of IDC notifications and incident case logs; reviewed DOD and military service guidance; and interviewed DOD, military service, and civilian officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends DOD clarify its guidance and expectations on incident determination notification methods and content based on its identification and analysis of associated risks. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-24-106985](#). For more information, contact Kristy E. Williams at (404) 679-1893 or [williamsk@gao.gov](mailto:williamsk@gao.gov).

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## DOMESTIC AND CHILD ABUSE

### DOD Needs to Clarify Guidance on Incident Determination Committee Notifications

## What GAO Found

Department of Defense (DOD) Incident Determination Committees (IDC) review thousands of reported incidents of domestic and child abuse to determine whether the incidents meet or do not meet DOD's criteria for abuse. DOD guidance states that military commanders, abuse victims, and alleged abusers should be notified in writing of IDC decisions. GAO found that commanders use IDC decisions to inform a range of command responses to abuse incidents, such as directing a service member to attend treatment (see table).

#### Ways That Commanders Use Incident Determination Committee Decisions, as Reported to GAO

As a partial basis to mandate treatment recommended by the Family Advocacy Program

As a partial basis to issue or remove a military protective or no-contact order

As a basis to consult staff judge advocate about next steps

As a partial basis for nonjudicial punishment

As a partial basis to pursue an administrative separation

To bar a civilian alleged abuser from an installation

To remove a requirement for spousal support when the service member is the abuse victim

As a basis to relocate family members or the service member

Source: GAO analysis of interviews with military officials. | GAO-24-106985

Note: The examples presented were cited in a least one of 38 interviews and group discussions we conducted with military and civilian officials to discuss commanders' use of IDC decisions.

Additionally, DOD and civilian officials GAO spoke with said they perceive that abuse victims and alleged abusers use IDC decisions in ways outside their intended purpose, such as in support of divorce and child custody legal proceedings. To address this issue, DOD stated that the military services were including in their notifications an explanation of the IDC process and purpose and a statement that the IDC is not a disciplinary proceeding.

However, GAO found that military service IDC decision notification processes vary and that most are at least partially inconsistent with DOD guidance and expectations regarding the method (i.e., verbal or written) and content of notifications. Specifically, GAO found that Navy and Marine Corps notifications are provided in writing, as required by DOD guidance, and that Army and Air Force notifications vary in notification method. GAO also found that the content of notifications varies across the military services and installations, with some explaining the IDC process and purpose and some not. This variation exists because DOD has not clearly communicated to the military services its guidance and expectations for the method and content of notifications. By clarifying notification guidance and expectations based on its analysis of risks associated with different notification methods and content, DOD can help ensure military service notifications communicate consistent information using appropriate methods. Clear and consistent communication to abuse victims and alleged abusers regarding the purpose of IDC decisions could, in turn, help reduce the potential for their use outside the intended context.