



Testimony

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the Workforce, House of
Representatives

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JOB CORPS

Preliminary Observations on Student Safety and Security Data

Statement of Cindy Brown Barnes, Director,
Education, Workforce, and Income Security

June 22, 2017

JOB CORPS

Preliminary Observations on Student Safety and Security Data

Why GAO Did This Study

The deaths of two Job Corps students in 2015 raised concerns about the safety and security of students in this program. The Job Corps program serves approximately 50,000 students each year at 125 centers nationwide.

Multiple DOL Office of Inspector General (OIG) audits have found deficiencies in the Office of Job Corps' efforts to oversee student safety. ETA and the Office of Job Corps have taken steps to address these concerns, but in March 2017, the DOL OIG raised new safety and security concerns, including some underreporting of incident data, and made related recommendations.

This testimony is based on GAO's ongoing work on these issues and provides preliminary observations on (1) the number and types of reported safety and security incidents involving Job Corps students, and (2) student perceptions of safety at Job Corps centers.

GAO analyzed ETA's reported incident data from January 1, 2007 through June 30, 2016. GAO's preliminary analysis summarizes reported incidents in the aggregate over this time period but the actual number is likely greater. GAO also analyzed student survey data from March 2007 through March 2017, reviewed relevant documentation, and interviewed ETA officials and DOL OIG officials.

What GAO Recommends

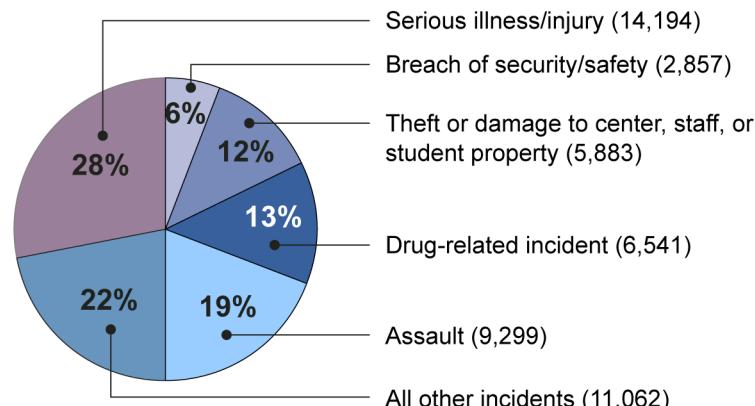
GAO is not making recommendations in this testimony but will consider recommendations, as appropriate, when ongoing work is finished. GAO incorporated comments from ETA as appropriate.

View GAO-17-596T. For more information, contact Cindy Brown Barnes, (202) 512-7215, brownbarnesc@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

GAO's preliminary analysis of the Department of Labor's (DOL) Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) incident data found that Job Corps centers reported 49,836 safety and security incidents of various types that occurred both onsite and offsite between January 1, 2007 and June 30, 2016. During this time period, approximately 539,000 students were enrolled in the program, according to ETA officials. ETA's Office of Job Corps is responsible for administering the Job Corps program, which is the nation's largest residential, educational, and career and technical training program for low-income youth generally between the ages of 16 and 24. As shown in the figure, the three most common types of reported incidents were serious illnesses or injuries, assaults, and drug-related incidents.

Types of Onsite and Offsite Safety and Security Incidents Reported by Job Corps Centers, January 1, 2007 – June 30, 2016



Source: GAO analysis of Employment and Training Administration (ETA) data. | GAO-17-596T

More than three-quarters of the reported incidents occurred onsite at Job Corps centers, and the rest occurred offsite. Most reported violent incidents—specifically assaults, homicides, and sexual assaults that occurred onsite and offsite—involved Job Corps students. For example, students were victims in 72 percent of these reported incidents, while staff were victims in 8 percent, and the remaining incidents involved victims who were not associated with Job Corps.

GAO's preliminary analysis of ETA's student survey data from March 2007 through March 2017 found that students generally reported feeling safe, but they reported feeling less safe with respect to certain issues. The student survey contains 49 questions about students' experiences in the Job Corps program, including 12 questions related to safety at centers. Across all 12 of these safety-related survey questions, an average of 72 percent of students reported feeling safe over this 10-year period. However, the average percentage of students who reported feeling safe on each individual survey question ranged from 44 percent to 91 percent. For example, an average of 44 percent of students reported that they had never heard students threaten each other, or had not heard such threats within the last month. The remaining 56 percent of students, on average, reported hearing such threats at least once in the last month.

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our preliminary observations on the safety and security of students in the Job Corps program. Job Corps is the nation's largest residential, educational, and career and technical training program for low-income youth generally between the ages of 16 and 24.¹ The program is administered by the Office of Job Corps in the Department of Labor's (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA), and serves approximately 50,000 students each year at 125 Job Corps centers nationwide.

DOL Office of Inspector General audits in 2009, 2010, and 2015 found that the Office of Job Corps did not properly address serious incidents related to student safety because of deficiencies in its oversight of program disciplinary policies.² In addition, the deaths of two students at two separate Job Corps centers in 2015 raised concerns. Since then, ETA and the Office of Job Corps have taken a number of steps to address safety and security concerns. In a March 2017 review, however, the Office of Inspector General found that the Office of Job Corps lacked an overall policy requiring centers to report potentially serious criminal misconduct to law enforcement, and that 12 Job Corps centers had physical security weaknesses, among other concerns, and made related recommendations.³ In its response to a draft of the Office of Inspector

¹In general, individuals must be 16 to 21 at the time of enrollment to be eligible for the Job Corps program. While the law makes an exception to allow individuals who are 22 to 24 at the time of enrollment to participate in the program, it limits their participation to 20 percent of Job Corps participants. The age limits may be waived by DOL, in accordance with DOL regulations, for individuals with a disability. For the legal provisions governing this program, see 29 U.S.C. § 3191 et seq.

²U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, *Job Corps Needs to Improve Enforcement and Oversight of Student Disciplinary Policies to Better Protect Students and Staff at Centers*, 26-15-001-03-370 (Washington, DC: February 27, 2015); *Performance Audit For ResCare, Inc., Job Corps Centers*, 26-10-002-01-370 (Washington, DC: March 2010); *Audit of Education and Training Resources, Job Corps Center Operator*, 26-10-003-01-370 (Washington, DC: March 2010); *Performance Audit of Adams and Associates, Incorporated Job Corps Centers*, 26-09-003-01-370 (Washington, DC: September 2009); and *Performance Audit of Management and Training Corporation Job Corps Centers*, 26-09-001-01-370 (Washington, DC: March 2009).

³Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, *Review of Job Corps Center Safety and Security*, 26-17-001-03-370 (March 31, 2017).

General's report, ETA said it had already implemented most of these recommendations.⁴

My testimony today will provide preliminary information on (1) the number and types of reported safety and security incidents involving Job Corps students,⁵ and (2) student perceptions of safety at Job Corps centers. This statement is based on our ongoing work examining safety and security issues in the Job Corps program.

To assess what is known about the number and types of reported incidents involving student safety and security at Job Corps centers, we analyzed ETA's incident data from January 1, 2007 through June 30, 2016.⁶ ETA captures this data in its Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS). We assessed the reliability of the SIRS data by reviewing relevant agency documentation about the data and the system that produced them, and interviewing ETA officials knowledgeable about the data. We also interviewed officials from DOL's Office of Inspector General, which recently found that these data were incomplete for a non-generalizable sample of 12 of 125 Job Corps centers because they failed to report over a third of the incidents that occurred.⁷ We determined, however, that the SIRS data were sufficiently reliable to report the minimum number of incidents, in aggregate, that occurred from January 1, 2007 through June 30, 2016. However, it is likely that the actual number of incidents was greater than the number we report in this statement. We plan to examine incident data in a more comprehensive manner in our ongoing work. The

⁴Officials from DOL's Office of Inspector General told us that they had not yet closed any of these recommendations as of June 14, 2017.

⁵This statement provides information about safety and security incidents involving students who were enrolled in the Job Corps program. We do not provide information about applicants who had not yet enrolled in the program, or students who were on medical leave from the program. While the major focus of our effort was on incidents involving students, we do provide some information on incidents involving Job Corps program staff.

⁶We did not include incident data after June 30, 2016, due to ETA policy changes that became effective on July 1, 2016, which impacted the categorization and number of reportable incidents. Although ETA put some of these changes in place prior to July 1, 2016, centers were not required to officially implement these changes until July 1, 2016. As such, the incident data after July 1, 2016, are not comparable with earlier data. However, we plan to examine these data in our ongoing work.

⁷In its March 2017 report, DOL's Office of Inspector General found that these centers did not report 34 percent of significant incidents in SIRS from January 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015.

incident categories and definitions in this statement are taken directly from ETA documents and represent how ETA categorizes these incidents. We did not assess these categories and definitions, nor did we conduct any research into the nature of the underlying events that led to the reporting of the incident. In some cases, we made minor editorial changes to the names of the incident categories for reporting purposes.

To assess what is known about student perceptions of safety and security at Job Corps centers, we analyzed ETA's national, summary-level student satisfaction survey data from March 2007 through March 2017. We assessed the reliability of the data by reviewing relevant agency documentation about the data and the system that produced them, and interviewing ETA officials knowledgeable about the data. Based on this assessment, we determined that the student survey data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes. We plan to examine student survey data in a more comprehensive manner in our ongoing work. In addition, we reviewed Job Corps policies and guidance related to safety and security, including the Job Corps Policy and Requirements Handbook, which establishes program policies and requirements, and technical guidance for entering SIRS data. We also interviewed ETA officials regarding ETA's efforts to improve safety for Job Corps students.

We are conducting the work upon which this statement is based 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

Job Corps' Eligibility Criteria and Program Services

To be eligible for the Job Corps program, an individual must generally be 16 to 24 years old at the time of enrollment;⁸ be low income;⁹ and have an additional barrier to education and employment, such as being homeless, a school dropout, or in foster care. Once enrolled in the program, youth are assigned to a specific Job Corps center, usually one located nearest their home and which offers a job training program of interest. The vast majority of students live at Job Corps centers in a residential setting, while the remaining students commute daily from their homes to their respective centers. This residential structure is unique among federal youth programs and enables Job Corps to provide a comprehensive array of services, including housing, meals, clothing, academic instruction, and job training.

Job Corps' Structure and Operations

ETA administers Job Corps' 125 centers through its national Office of Job Corps under the leadership of a national director and a field network of six regional offices located in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. Job Corps is operated primarily through contracts, which according to ETA officials, is unique among ETA's employment and training programs (other such programs are generally operated through grants to states). Among the 125 centers, 99 are operated under contracts with large and small businesses, nonprofit organizations, and Native American tribes. The remaining 26 centers (called Civilian Conservation Centers) are operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service through an interagency agreement with DOL. Job Corps center contractors and the USDA Forest Service employ center staff who provide program services to students. According to ETA officials, the primary responsibility for ensuring safety and security

⁸In general, individuals must be 16 to 21 at the time of enrollment to be eligible for the Job Corps program. While the law makes an exception to allow individuals who are 22 to 24 at the time of enrollment to participate in the program, it limits their participation to 20 percent of Job Corps participants. The age limits may be waived by DOL, in accordance with DOL regulations, for individuals with a disability. For the legal provisions governing this program, see 29 U.S.C. § 3191 et seq.

⁹The criteria for being considered low income include receiving certain public assistance or having a total family income that does not exceed the higher of the poverty line or 70 percent of the lower living standard income level.

at Job Corps centers resides with center operators. Also, according to ETA officials, the Office of Job Corps has oversight and monitoring responsibility to ensure that contract operators are in full compliance with their contract and that both contract centers and USDA-operated Civilian Conservation Centers follow Job Corps' Policy and Requirements Handbook.

In September 2015, as part of its overall effort to improve safety and security for students, ETA established the Division of Regional Operations and Program Integrity within the national Office of Job Corps. This division is responsible for coordinating regional operations and activities, including efforts to strengthen communications between the national and regional offices, strengthen quality assurance, and promote continuous improvement. The division is also responsible for reviewing the results of all risk management data, center safety and culture assessments, and responses to safety and security deficiencies at individual centers. For example, this division is to monitor the safety and security of Job Corps centers through ongoing oversight by regional offices, including daily monitoring of SIRS data.

Requirements for Job Corps Centers Related to Incident Reporting

Job Corps' Policy and Requirements Handbook requires centers to report certain significant incidents to the national Office of Job Corps and to regional offices in SIRS within 6 or 24 hours of becoming aware of them, depending on the incident.¹⁰ Specifically, centers are required to report numerous categories of incidents, including deaths, assaults, alcohol and drug-related incidents, serious illnesses and injuries, and hospitalizations (see appendix I for definitions of these categories of incidents).¹¹ Centers must report incidents involving both Job Corps students and staff, and incidents that occur onsite at centers as well as those that occur at offsite locations. Offsite incidents include those that occur while students are participating in program-related activities, such as off-center training and

¹⁰According to the Policy and Requirements Handbook, centers must report most incidents within 24 hours of becoming aware of them. With respect to certain types of incidents, including deaths of students and on-duty staff, centers must report them immediately to the regional office, and report them in SIRS within 6 hours of becoming aware of them.

¹¹When centers report these incidents in SIRS, they are required to assign them a primary incident type, and they may also assign them one or more secondary incident types. For example, the primary incident type of "assault" includes the following secondary incident types: assault/battery, bullying, fight, hazing, homicide, mugging/robbery, and other.

field trips. Offsite incidents also include those that occur while students are not participating in program-related activities, such as when they are at home during breaks.

In some cases, the incident categories in SIRS are related to the specific infractions defined in the Policy and Requirements Handbook, which are classified according to their level of severity. Level I infractions are the most serious, and include such infractions as arrest for a felony or violent misdemeanor or possession of a weapon, and are required to be reported in SIRS. Level II infractions include such infractions as possession of a potentially dangerous item like a box cutter, or arrest for a non-violent misdemeanor. The majority of these infractions are required to be reported in SIRS. Minor infractions—the lowest level of infractions—include failure to follow center rules, and are not required to be reported in SIRS.

Within the Policy and Requirements Handbook, ETA establishes a Zero Tolerance Policy, which specifies actions that centers must take in response to certain incidents. ETA implemented changes to this policy effective on July 1, 2016, which impacted the categorization and number of reportable incidents.¹² Under the prior Zero Tolerance Policy, there were fewer infractions categorized as Level I, which are the most severe and result in termination from the program.¹³ The July 2016 policy changes broadened the types of infractions categorized as Level I. For example, ETA elevated several infractions previously classified as Level II to Level I, and added several new categories of reportable incidents. According to ETA officials, they made these changes to reflect a heightened emphasis on student safety.

Job Corps Student Satisfaction Survey

ETA currently surveys all students enrolled in Job Corps in March and September each year to collect information on a variety of topics, including their perceptions of safety at Job Corps centers. The current

¹²This policy change was effective on July 1, 2016, but ETA added several new incident categories in SIRS prior to this date. As a result, the data we report through June 30, 2016 includes some data for these new categories. However, centers were not required to officially report data in these new categories until July 1, 2016. For more information on these new incident categories, see appendix I.

¹³The Policy and Requirements Handbook states that centers are to conduct investigations and recommend appropriate sanctions, and that they must also have an appeals process for students.

student survey contains 49 questions on various aspects of the Job Corps program, including career development services, interactions between students and staff, access to alcohol and drugs, and overall satisfaction with the program. The survey includes 12 questions on students' perceptions of safety at centers. ETA has been conducting this survey since 2002, and in recent years has administered it twice a year.¹⁴ ETA officials told us they plan to survey students more frequently beginning in July 2017. Specifically, they plan to survey students on a monthly basis regarding their perceptions of safety, and on a quarterly basis regarding their overall satisfaction with the program. ETA uses the responses to the safety-related survey questions to calculate a center safety rating, which represents the percentage of Job Corps students who report feeling safe at each center, as well as a national safety rating, which represents the percentage of Job Corps students who report feeling safe nationwide.

¹⁴ETA has administered the survey twice a year since 2009. In 2008, ETA administered the survey three times. Between 2002 and 2008, ETA administered the survey four times a year.

Job Corps Centers Reported a Variety of Types of Incidents between January 2007 and June 2016, Many of Which Occurred Onsite

The Most Common Types of Reported Onsite and Offsite Incidents Included Serious Illnesses or Injuries, Assaults, and Drug-Related Incidents

Our preliminary analysis of ETA's SIRS data shows that Job Corps centers reported 49,836 safety and security incidents, including those that occurred both onsite and offsite, from January 1, 2007 through June 30, 2016.¹⁵ During this time period, approximately 539,000 students were enrolled in the program, according to ETA officials. Three types of incidents represented 60 percent of all reported incidents: serious illnesses or injuries (28 percent),¹⁶ assaults (19 percent),¹⁷ and drug-related incidents (13 percent). The remaining 40 percent of reported incidents included theft or damage to center, staff, or student property (12 percent), breaches of security or safety (6 percent), and all other types of incidents (22 percent). During this time period, Job Corps centers

¹⁵To calculate the total number and types of incidents overall, we analyzed the primary incident type that was assigned to each incident reported in SIRS.

¹⁶According to ETA documentation, the serious illness and injury category includes injury, illness, or disease that is serious or widespread among students and/or staff (e.g., communicable disease outbreak, reaction to medication/immunization, emergency surgery, hospitalization, emergency room treatment, etc.). Incidents which require medical treatment due to the physical effects of drug or alcohol use (drug overdose, alcohol poisoning, etc.) are included in this category.

¹⁷The assault category does not include sexual assaults, which are captured in a separate category.

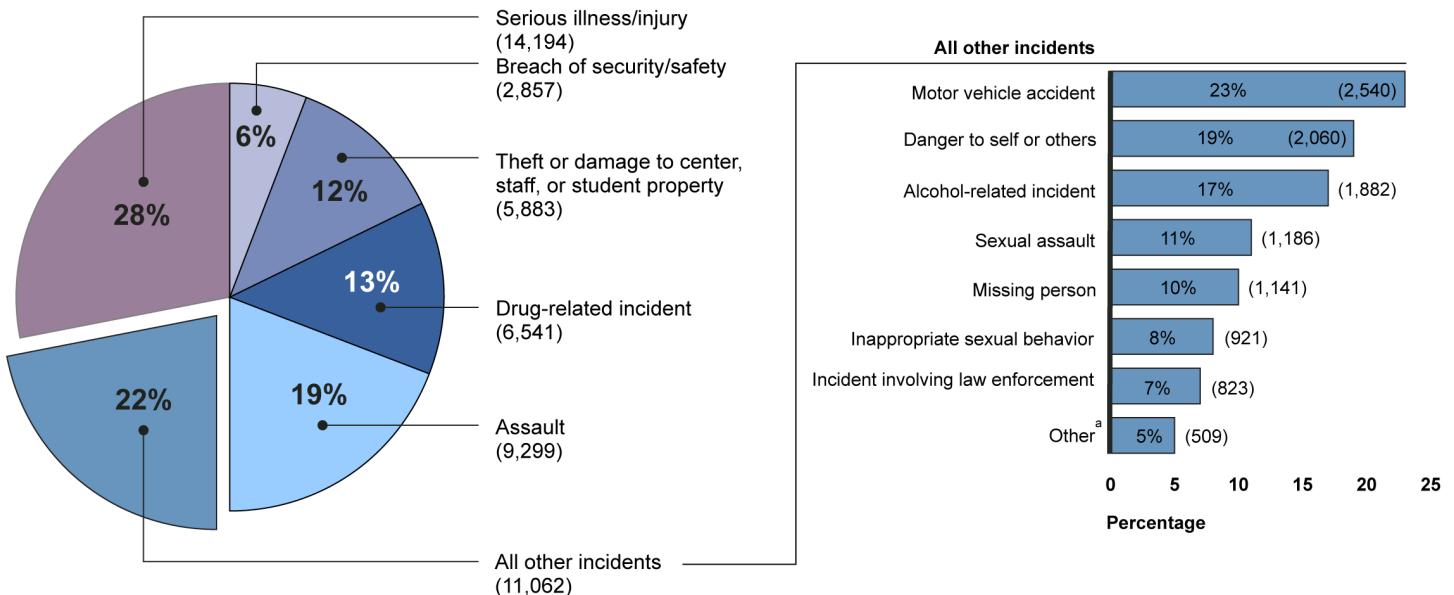
reported 265 deaths,¹⁸ including 61 deaths that occurred onsite and 204 that occurred offsite. Most of these reported deaths were homicides (25 percent),¹⁹ due to medical causes (23 percent), and due to accidental causes (22 percent).²⁰ In figure 1 below, 246 of these deaths are captured in the “Other” category, and 19 of these deaths are captured in the “Assault” category.

¹⁸To calculate the total number and types of deaths, we analyzed both primary incident types and secondary incident types. In SIRS, deaths can be reported under three different primary incident types (“death,” “assault,” and “danger to self or others”). When an incident is assigned any of these primary incident types, it may also be assigned a secondary incident type of “homicide,” among other secondary incident types. The 265 deaths reported in SIRS during this time period include 246 deaths with a primary incident type of “death,” and 19 deaths with a primary incident type of “assault” and a secondary incident type of “homicide.” During this time period, there were no deaths reported with a primary incident type of “danger to self or others” and a secondary incident type of “homicide.”

¹⁹The 65 homicides reported in SIRS during this time period include 46 homicides with a primary incident type of “death” and a secondary incident type of “homicide,” and 19 homicides with a primary incident type of “assault” and a secondary incident type of “homicide.”

²⁰The remaining 30 percent of deaths were due to unknown causes (13 percent), suicides (11 percent), and other causes (6 percent). ETA officials told us that deaths are categorized as being due to unknown causes based on the coroner’s assessment that the cause of death is unknown. Officials said that deaths are categorized as being due to other causes when the cause of death is known, but it is not covered by any of the other categories.

Figure 1: Types of Onsite and Offsite Safety and Security Incidents Reported by Job Corps Centers, January 1, 2007 – June 30, 2016



Source: GAO analysis of Employment and Training Administration (ETA) data. | GAO-17-596T

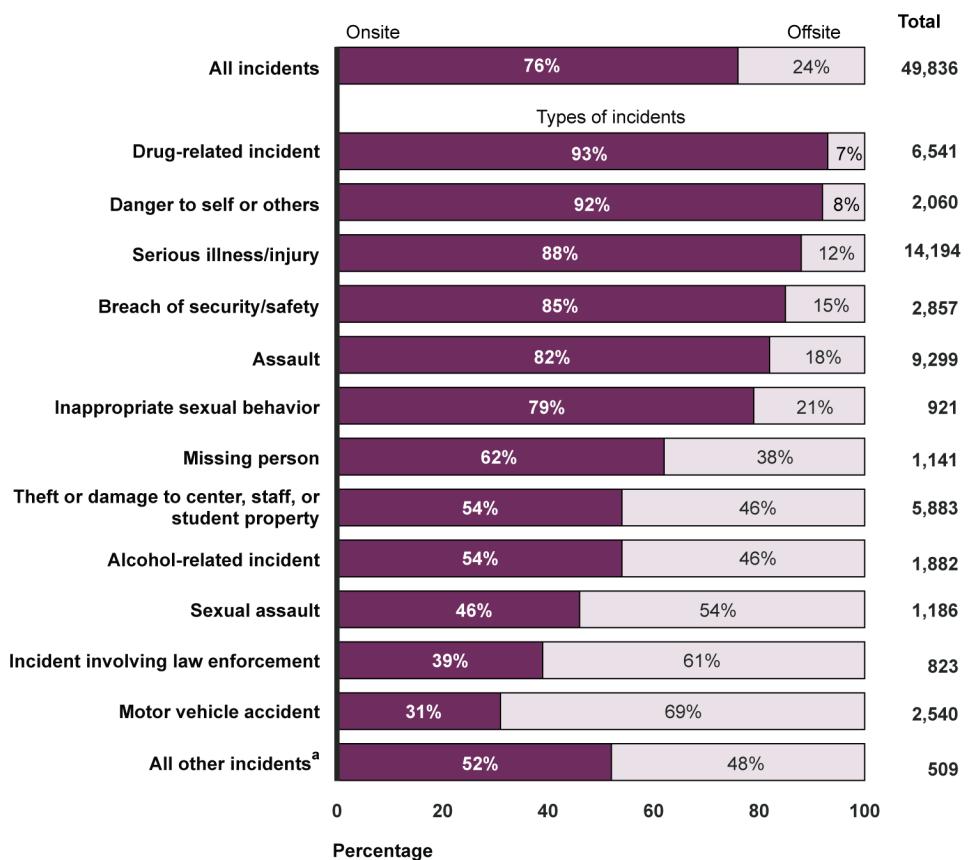
Note: The figure includes incidents that were reported in the Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) database and shows the primary incident type that was assigned to each incident.

^a"Other" consists of the following types of incidents, which each represent less than 1 percent of all incidents: arrest, death, hospitalization, incident involving a missing minor student, incident attracting potentially negative media attention, incident involving illegal activity (that is not covered in any of the other categories), incident threatening to close down center/disrupt center operations, miscellaneous, and safety/hazmat.

Most Reported Incidents Occurred Onsite at Job Corps Centers, but the Majority of Reported Deaths Occurred Offsite

Our preliminary analysis showed that from January 1, 2007 through June 30, 2016, 76 percent of the reported safety and security incidents occurred onsite at Job Corps centers, and 24 percent occurred at offsite locations (see fig.2). While most reported incidents occurred onsite, our preliminary analysis showed that the majority of reported deaths occurred offsite. During this time period, of the 265 reported deaths, 77 percent occurred offsite, and 23 percent occurred onsite. The vast majority of homicides reported during this time period occurred offsite, and very few occurred onsite. Of 65 reported homicides, 61 occurred at offsite locations and 4 occurred onsite.

Figure 2: Type and Location of Safety and Security Incidents Reported by Job Corps Centers, January 1, 2007 – June 30, 2016



Source: GAO analysis of Employment and Training Administration (ETA) data. | GAO-17-596T

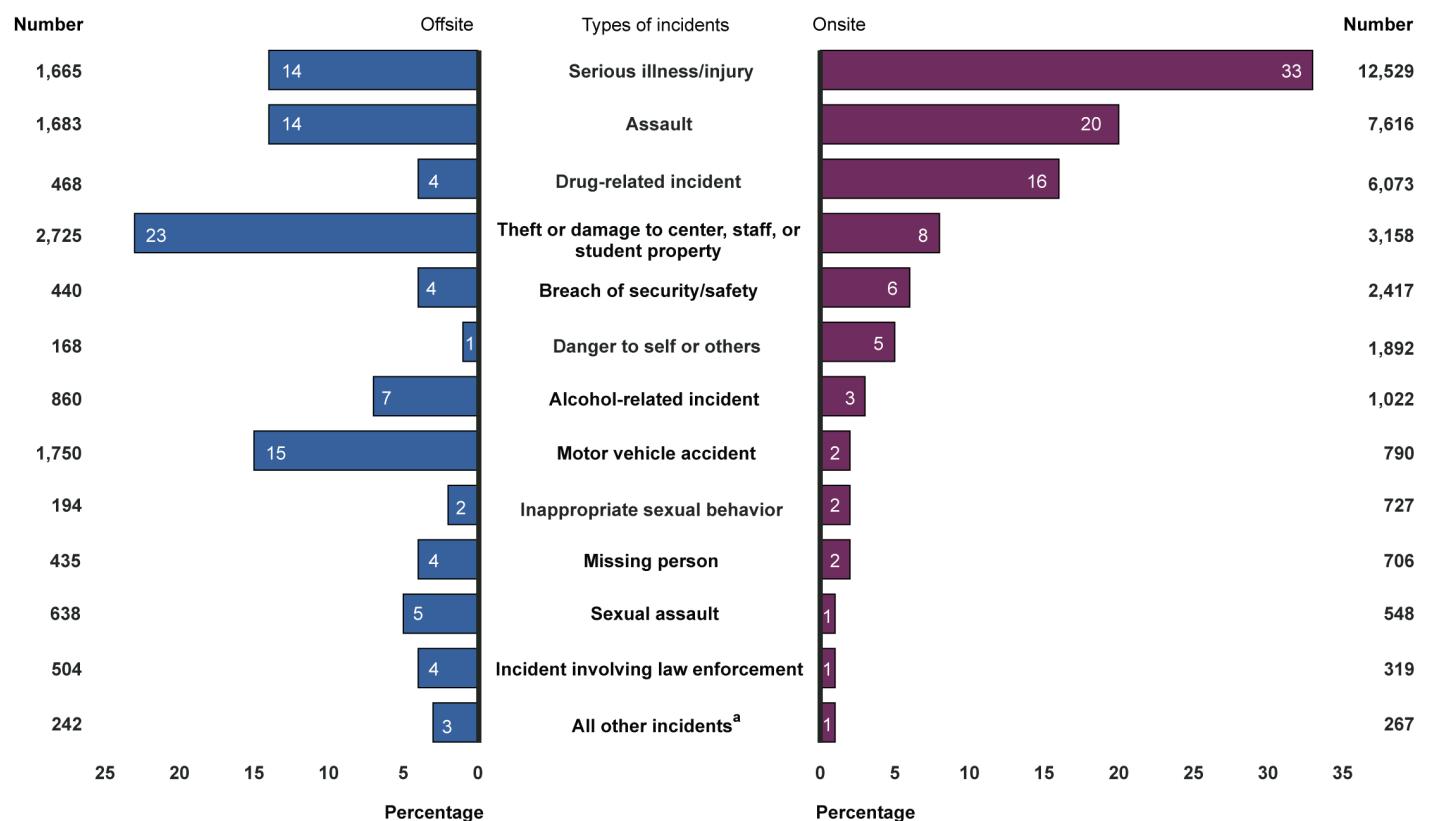
Note: The figure includes incidents that were reported in the Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) database and shows the primary incident type that was assigned to each incident.

^a"All other incidents" consists of the following types of incidents, which each represent less than 1 percent of all incidents: arrest, death, hospitalization, incident involving a missing minor student, incident attracting potentially negative media attention, incident involving illegal activity (that is not covered in any of the other categories), incident threatening to close down center/disrupt center operations, miscellaneous, and safety/hazmat.

During this time period, the most common types of reported onsite incidents were generally different from the most common types of reported offsite incidents, although reported assaults were common in both locations. The most common types of reported onsite incidents were the same as the most common types of incidents overall: serious illnesses or injuries (33 percent), assaults (20 percent), and drug-related incidents (16 percent). Of all reported offsite incidents, the most common types were thefts or damage to center, staff, or student property (23

percent), motor vehicle accidents (15 percent), assaults (14 percent), and serious illnesses or injuries (14 percent) (see fig.3).

Figure 3: Types of Onsite and Offsite Safety and Security Incidents Reported by Job Corps Centers, January 1, 2007 – June 30, 2016



Source: GAO analysis of Employment and Training Administration (ETA) data. | GAO-17-596T

Note: The figure includes incidents that were reported in the Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) database and shows the primary incident type that was assigned to each incident.

^a"All other incidents" consists of the following types of incidents, which each represent less than 1 percent of all incidents: arrest, death, hospitalization, incident involving a missing minor student, incident attracting potentially negative media attention, incident involving illegal activity (that is not covered in any of the other categories), incident threatening to close down center/disrupt center operations, miscellaneous, and safety/hazmat.

Most Reported Onsite and Offsite Violent Incidents Involved Job Corps Students, and Considerably Fewer Involved Program Staff

Our preliminary analysis showed that from January 1, 2007 through June 30, 2016, most reported violent incidents—specifically assaults, homicides, and sexual assaults that occurred both onsite and offsite—involved Job Corps students, and considerably fewer of these incidents involved program staff.²¹ During this time period, Job Corps centers reported 10,531 violent incidents, which represented 21 percent of all reported onsite and offsite incidents. Students were victims in 72 percent of these reported violent incidents, while staff were victims in 8 percent of these incidents. Similarly, students were perpetrators in 85 percent of these reported violent incidents, while staff were perpetrators in 1 percent of these incidents (see table 1).²² Each of these reported violent incidents involved at least one victim or perpetrator who was a Job Corps student or staff member, but some of these incidents also involved victims or perpetrators who were not associated with the Job Corps program.

²¹For the purposes of this statement, we defined violent incidents to include assaults, sexual assaults, and deaths that Job Corps centers categorized as homicides in SIRS. ETA officials told us that Job Corps centers categorize deaths as homicides based on a determination by law enforcement.

²²For the purposes of this analysis, we only included students who were enrolled in the program. We did not include former students, applicants who had not yet enrolled in the program, or students who were on medical leave from the program.

Table 1: Number and Percentage of Reported Onsite and Offsite Violent Incidents with Student Victims and Perpetrators, and Staff Victims and Perpetrators, January 1, 2007 – June 30, 2016

Total number of reported incidents	Reported incidents involving students		Reported incidents involving staff	
	Victims (number and percentage of incidents) ^a	Perpetrators (number and percentage of incidents) ^a	Victims (number and percentage of incidents) ^a	Perpetrators (number and percentage of incidents) ^a
Assaults	9,280 ^b	6,459 (70)	8,153 (88)	781 (8)
Homicides	65 ^b	41 (63)	23 (35)	5 (8)
Sexual Assaults	1,186	1,061 (90)	723 (62)	2 (<1)
Total	10,531	7,561 (72)	8,889 (85)	788 (8)
				134 (1)

Source: GAO analysis of Employment and Training Administration (ETA) data. | GAO-17-596T

Note: The table includes incidents that were reported in the Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) database.

^aPercentages do not total 100 percent because some incidents had multiple victims or perpetrators, and some incidents involved victims or perpetrators who were not Job Corps students or staff. For the purposes of this analysis, we only included students who were enrolled in the program. We did not include former students, applicants who had not yet enrolled in the program, or students who were on medical leave from the program.

^bOverall, there were 9,299 reported incidents with a primary incident type of “assault.” However, 19 of these assaults were assigned a secondary incident type of “homicide.” For the purposes of this analysis of violent incidents, we categorized these 19 assaults as homicides.

Students Generally Reported Feeling Safe, but Reported Feeling Less Safe on Certain Safety and Security Issues

Our preliminary analysis of ETA’s student satisfaction survey data from March 2007 to March 2017 showed that while students generally reported feeling safe at Job Corps centers, they reported feeling less safe on certain safety and security issues.²³ Overall, across all 12 of the safety-related survey questions, an average of 72 percent of students reported feeling safe during this time period.²⁴ However, the average percentage of

²³Over this time period, ETA conducted 24 surveys of all students enrolled in Job Corps on a biannual or more frequent basis. From March 2009 to March 2017, ETA conducted this survey biannually in March and September. In 2008, ETA conducted this survey in March, June, and September. In 2007, ETA conducted this survey in March, June, September, and December. From March 2007 to March 2017, the average overall response rate was 88 percent, and ranged from 85 percent to 92 percent. The average response rate for the 12 safety-related questions was 83 percent, and ranged from 80 percent to 86 percent.

²⁴We calculated the average percentage of students who reported feeling safe across all 12 questions by calculating the average percentage who reported feeling safe on each individual question, and then calculating the average of those 12 percentages. ETA considers students to feel safe if they provide certain responses to each of the 12 safety-related survey questions, some of which are phrased as statements. For example, if a student provided a response of “mostly false” or “very false” to the statement “I thought about leaving Job Corps because of a personal safety concern,” that student would be counted as feeling safe on that survey question.

students who reported feeling safe on each individual survey question ranged from 44 percent to 91 percent. For 7 of the 12 questions, student responses were above the 72 percent average, which indicates students felt more safe; however, for 5 of the questions, student responses were below the average, which indicates students felt less safe (see table 2). For example, an average of 44 percent of students reported that they had never heard students threaten each other, or had not heard such threats within the last month. The remaining 56 percent of students, on average, reported hearing such threats at least once in the last month.

Table 2: Average Percentage of Job Corps Students Who Reported Feeling Safe on Each Safety-Related Survey Question, March 2007 to March 2017

Survey Question ^a	Responses Indicating That Students Feel Safe ^b	Average Percentage of Students Who Reported Feeling Safe ^c
Seven questions on which students reported feeling more safe (above the average of 72 percent across all 12 safety-related questions)		
How often did you carry a weapon—like a knife, club, or sharp object—with you on center?	Never or Not in the Last Month	91
How often were you in a physical fight with a student on center?	Never or Not in the Last Month	89
A student would be terminated if he/she was found with a weapon—like a knife, club, or sharp object—on center.	Very True or Mostly True	83
I thought about going to a different Job Corps center because I felt threatened by other students.	Mostly False or Very False	80
I could talk to my residential advisor if I was threatened by another student.	Very True or Mostly True	76
How often did other students pick on you even after you asked them to stop?	Never or Not in the Last Month	76
I could talk to my counselor if I was threatened by another student.	Very True or Mostly True	74
Five questions on which students reported feeling less safe (below the average of 72 percent across all 12 safety-related questions)		
How often did other students say things to make you feel like you are not important?	Never or Not in the Last Month	68
I thought about leaving Job Corps because of a personal safety concern.	Mostly False or Very False	65
How often did you see a physical fight between students on center?	Never or Not in the Last Month	63
The zero tolerance policy was applied equally to all students.	Very True or Mostly True	62
How often did you hear a student threaten another student on center?	Never or Not in the Last Month	44

Source: GAO analysis of Employment and Training Administration (ETA) data. | GAO-17-596T

^aThe survey asks students to answer the questions for the time period of the last month. For example, the survey asks students how often they carried a weapon with them at the center in the last month.

^bAccording to ETA documentation, these are the survey responses that ETA considers to indicate that students feel safe.

^cThis represents the average percentage of students who reported feeling safe on each safety-related survey question over the 24 administrations of the survey conducted between March 2007 and March 2017. We rounded the average percentages to the nearest whole number. For each of these average percentages, the minimum and maximum percentages on each question were no more than +/- 10 percentage points of the average.

ETA uses students' responses to the safety-related survey questions to calculate a safety rating for each Job Corps center and a national safety rating for the program overall. According to ETA officials, the center safety rating represents the percentage of students who report feeling

safe at a center, and the national safety rating represents the percentage of students who report feeling safe nationwide. Throughout the period of March 2007 through March 2017, the national safety rating remained above 82 percent, according to ETA data. ETA officials said they use these ratings as management tools to assess students' perceptions of safety at individual centers and nationwide, and to determine whether ETA needs to act upon these results to better address students' safety and security concerns.

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Committee, this concludes my prepared remarks. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

GAO Contact and Acknowledgments

For further information regarding this testimony, please contact Cindy Brown Barnes at (202) 512-7215 or brownbarnesc@gao.gov. Contact points of our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. Individuals who made key contributions to this testimony include Mary Crenshaw (Assistant Director), Caitlin Croake (Analyst in Charge), David Chrisinger, Alexander Galuten, LaToya Jeanita King, Rebecca Kuhlmann Taylor, Grant Mallie, Sheila McCoy, Meredith Moore, Mimi Nguyen, Lorin Obler, Matthew Saradjian, Monica Savoy, Almeta Spencer, Amy Sweet, Walter Vance, Kathleen van Gelder, and Ashanta Williams.

Appendix I. Categories of Incidents in the Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS)

Table 3. Categories of Incidents in the Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) and Related Definitions, as of December 2016

SIRS Incident Category	ETA's Definition
Alcohol-related Incident	An incident involving the discovery of alcohol on center, or involving any student found in possession of alcohol or charged by local law enforcement agencies with illegal alcohol consumption or possession. Incidents which require medical treatment due to the physical effects of drug use (alcohol poisoning, etc.) should be reported under the "Medical Incident" Primary Incident Code.
Arrest ^a	This code applies when a student is arrested for an incident that occurred prior to his/her enrollment in Job Corps.
Assault	These are acts that are commonly known as assault, battery, or mugging; any assault with a weapon or object; or any altercation resulting in medical treatment for injuries. Mugging (robbery) is included in this category because it pertains more to an assault upon a person than on property. Homicide has been removed as a Primary Incident Code and is now listed under Assault as a Secondary Incident Code.
Breach of Security/Safety	This code applies to any incidents that threaten the security and safety of center students, staff, and property which may result in injury, illness, fatality, and/or property damage. Examples include arson, bomb threat, gang-related incidents, possession of gun, possession of an illegal weapon, unauthorized access to center buildings, grounds, or restricted areas, and verbal threats.
Danger to Self or Others ^a	Attempted suicide is a deliberate action by student to self-inflict bodily harm in an attempt to kill one's self. Centers need only report a suicide threat (suicidal ideation) if it results in evaluation by a physician or mental health consultant.
Death	Centers must report the death of any student who is enrolled in Job Corps regardless of his/her duty status. Centers are only required to report the death of a staff member if the death occurs while on duty, either on center or off center.
Drug-Related Incident	Incidents involving any student or staff found in possession of or charged by local law enforcement agencies with a drug offense (e.g. the illegal use, possession, or distribution of a controlled substance), or the discovery of drugs on center. Incidents which require medical treatment due to the physical effects of drug use (overdose, etc.) should be reported under the "Medical Incident" Primary Incident Code.
Hospitalization ^a	ETA's Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) Technical Guide does not provide a definition of this category.
Inappropriate Sexual Behavior	Sexual misconduct includes the intentional touching, mauling, or feeling of the body or private parts of any person without the consent of that person. Sexual harassment or unsolicited offensive behavior such as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature is also included.
Incident Attracting Potentially Negative Media Attention ^a	ETA's Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) Technical Guide does not provide a definition of this category.
Incident Involving Law Enforcement Involvement ^a	ETA's Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) Technical Guide does not provide a definition of this category.
Incident Involving a Missing Minor Student ^a	ETA's Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) Technical Guide does not provide a definition of this category.
Incident Involving Illegal Activity (Not Covered By Other Categories) ^a	ETA's Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) Technical Guide does not provide a definition of this category.

**Appendix I. Categories of Incidents in the
Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS)**

SIRS Incident Category	ETA's Definition
Incident Threatening to Close Down Center/Disrupt Center Operations ^a	ETA's Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) Technical Guide does not provide a definition of this category.
Missing Person	ETA's Significant Incident Reporting System (SIRS) Technical Guide does not provide a definition of this category.
Motor Vehicle Accident	Motor vehicle accidents involving any Job Corps student, on duty staff member, and/or center-owned vehicle should be reported using this code. Incidents in which a pedestrian is struck by a motor vehicle should be reported under the "Medical Incident" Primary Incident Code.
Safety/Hazmat	<p>Safety/Hazmat are incidents involving hazardous materials/chemicals in any solid, liquid, or gas form that can cause harm to humans, plants, animals, property, or the environment. A hazardous material can be radiological, explosive, toxic, corrosive, biohazard, an oxidizer, an asphyxiant or have other characteristics that render it hazardous in specific circumstances.</p> <p>Hazmat/toxic-mercury, gasoline, asbestos, lead, used syringe, blood</p> <p>Hazmat/non-toxic-water, oxygen (can become hazardous under specific circumstances)</p>
Serious Illness/Injury ^a	Medical incidents include any diagnosis of injury, illness, or disease which is serious or widespread among students and/or staff, (e.g. communicable disease outbreak, reaction to medication/immunization, emergency surgery, hospitalization, emergency room treatment, etc.). Incidents which require medical treatment due to the physical effects of drug and/or alcohol use (drug overdose, alcohol poisoning, etc.) should be included in this category.
Sexual Assault	Sexual assault includes any alleged non-consenting sexual act involving forceful physical contact including attempted rape, rape, sodomy, and others. If forceful physical contact is not used, the incident should be reported as a Sexual Misconduct.
Theft or Damage to Center, Staff or Student Property	Property incidents are any incident by students or staff that involve the destruction, theft, or attempted theft of property; this includes but is not limited to automobile theft, burglary, vandalism, and shoplifting. If any type of force is used against another person, the incident is to be reported under the "Assault" Primary Incident Code. Property incidents also include natural occurrences/disasters or any other incident threatening to close down the center or disrupting the center's operation (e.g. hurricane, flooding, earthquake, water main break, power failure, fire, etc.).

Source: Employment and Training Administration (ETA) documentation. | GAO-17-596T

^aThese incident categories were added to SIRS in June 2016. Some of these new categories previously existed in SIRS, but were renamed in June 2016. Others were entirely new categories as of June 2016. Centers were not required to officially report data in these new categories until July 1, 2016.

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