

## GAO: Justice Department Could Better Measure Progress Of Federal Incarceration Issues

By Administrator  
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RALEIGH, (SGRToday.com) - A review by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) shows the Department of Justice could enhance the measurement of initiatives designed to address major challenges in the federal prison system.

The GAO findings are below. They can be found, along with a descriptions of why GAO did the study and what it recommends, at [gao.gov](http://gao.gov).

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The Department of Justice (DOJ) has implemented three key initiatives to address the federal incarceration challenges of overcrowding, rising costs, and offender recidivism, which includes the return of offenders to prison after release. The Smart on Crime Initiative involves multiple DOJ components and has five key goals, one of which involves prioritizing the prosecution of the most serious cases. The Clemency Initiative is intended to encourage federal inmates who meet criteria that DOJ established to petition to have their sentences commuted, or reduced, by the President. DOJ is now more focused on prioritizing its review of these petitions, which have increased from about 1,600 in 2011 to about 6,600 in 2014. Finally, DOJ's Bureau of Prisons (BOP) recently established a Reentry Services Division (RSD) to facilitate a more centralized approach to overseeing reentry programs and better assisting offenders in their reentry to society.

DOJ has several early efforts under way to measure the success of these initiatives, but its current approach could be enhanced. In particular:

**Smart on Crime Initiative:** GAO found that DOJ's 16 recently established Smart on Crime indicators were well linked to the effort's overall goals. However, in many cases, the indicators lacked other key elements of successful performance measurement systems GAO has previously identified, such as clarity and context. For example, 7 of the 16 indicators are confusing or do not represent the information the indicator name implies, and 13 of the 16 indicators lack contextual information needed to appropriately interpret their results. DOJ officials said they focused their initial indicators on data already available rather than developing new indicators. Although measuring performance can be a challenge for prosecutorial agencies such as DOJ, research indicates that improved data collection and clearly defined goals and progress measures can help agencies develop effective performance measurement systems. By exploring such options, DOJ would be better positioned to more effectively measure its efforts through the Smart on Crime Initiative.

**Clemency Initiative:** DOJ tracks some statistics related to its Clemency Initiative, such as the number of petitions received and the disposition of each, but it does not track how long, on average, it takes for petitions to clear each step in its review process. Such tracking would help DOJ identify processes that might be contributing to any delays. Without this tracking, DOJ cannot be sure about the extent to which the additional resources it is dedicating to this effort are helping to identify and expedite the review of inmate petitions.

**Reentry programs:** BOP has recently developed a plan to conduct evaluations of some of its

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reentry programs related to psychology treatment services, but it does not have a plan to prioritize evaluations among all 18 of the programs it lists in its national reentry directory. Modifying its current evaluation plan to consider all of these programs would better position DOJ to know the extent to which its investments in programs intended to reduce recidivism are effective.

DOJ's early efforts to implement the Smart on Crime Initiative are consistent with GAO's key collaboration best practices, such as establishing mutually reinforcing strategies. For example, DOJ directed its law enforcement components and United States Attorneys' Offices to coordinate on establishing prosecution priorities and antiviolence strategies nationwide.