



Highlights of [GAO-10-5](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

### Why GAO Did This Study

In 1976, Congress established the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) program, which is administered by the Department of Justice (Justice) and provides lump-sum payments to eligible public safety officers and their survivors after a line-of-duty death or permanent and total disability. The program also provides educational benefits to an eligible officer's spouse and children.

GAO was asked to determine (1) the extent to which claimants receive PSOB program benefits and how long the claims process takes, (2) any issues raised by state and local agencies and others who assist claimants in seeking benefits, and (3) the extent to which the PSOB program follows recognized government standards and guidelines for effective program management. To address these objectives, we reviewed PSOB claims that were opened during fiscal years 2006 to 2008 for all three types of claims, reviewed relevant agency documents, and interviewed PSOB program officials, representatives of advocacy organizations, and state and local officials in five selected states.

### What GAO Recommends

To enhance program accountability and claimant awareness, GAO recommends that PSOB establish appropriate performance measures and use reliable data to monitor and report on the program's performance. Justice agreed with these recommendations and has begun taking steps to implement program improvements.

[View GAO-10-5 or key components.](#)  
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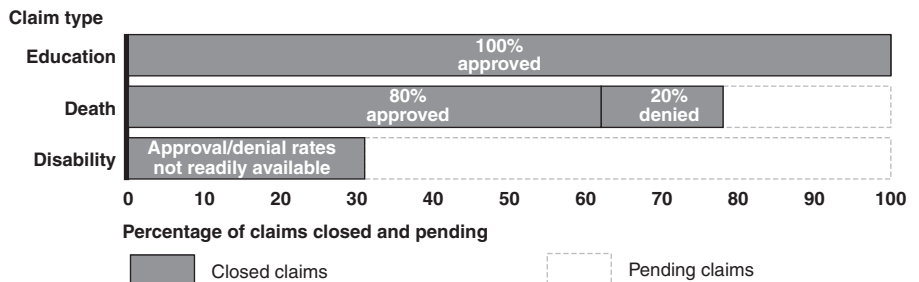
## PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS' BENEFITS PROGRAM

### Performance Measurement Would Strengthen Accountability and Enhance Awareness among Potential Claimants

#### What GAO Found

GAO found that all education claims and over three-quarters of death claims opened in fiscal years 2006 through 2008 were closed and approved as of April 2009, while only about 31 percent of disability claims initiated during that period had determinations. The majority of disability claims remained pending because they took significantly longer to process than other claims—while education and death claims were generally processed in under a year, disability claims took between 17 and 26 months. GAO was unable to pinpoint which steps of the claims process were most time-consuming because claims files that GAO reviewed did not consistently document the date when claims passed through each step of the process.

**Status of Education, Death, and Disability Claims, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2008, as of Date of GAO File Review**



Source: GAO analysis of data from Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance.

Note: The percentages above are based on sample data and have, at most, a plus or minus 10 percent margin of error.

State and local officials GAO interviewed were generally concerned about their lack of awareness of certain PSOB program benefits, challenges with establishing eligibility, and the perceived long wait time for benefits. Specifically, officials were generally more aware of death than disability and education benefits. Officials also stated that submitting all the necessary paperwork to prove eligibility was difficult and time-consuming due, in part, to how long it took to obtain necessary documents from other organizations. Officials most frequently expressed concern about perceived long wait times for receiving benefits and also reported difficulties obtaining information about claims status.

While it is taking steps to improve, the PSOB program does not follow government guidelines for performance monitoring. Specifically, according to Justice officials, the PSOB program has not set strategic goals and measures, monitored performance, or reported results because it is a payment program, and its budget is largely mandatory. However, other federal programs that provide benefits after work-related injury and illness have established performance measures, such as ones for claims-processing timeliness, and report their results publicly. Also, while the PSOB program has initiated several outreach and assistance efforts to claimants and state and local agencies in recent years, these efforts are not monitored, resulting in uncertainty as to whether they are adequate.