



Testimony  
of

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*"Northern Exposure: Assessing the Evolving Threat Landscape at America's Northern Border"*

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Chairmen Guest and Pfluger, Ranking Members Correa and Magaziner, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am honored to represent the men and women of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), who carry out complex criminal investigations that safeguard our national security, protect our communities, and preserve the integrity of our economy. Whether on the northern or southern border, or around the world, our special agents confront a broad range of threats, including drug cartels, human trafficking networks, weapons trafficking, bulk cash and trade-based money laundering, digital asset abuse, child exploitation, and crimes that overlap with terrorism and hostile foreign actors. These threats are interconnected and transnational, and they increasingly exploit the shared systems and geography of the United States and Canada. However, our unique combination of authorities and capabilities—including digital forensics expertise, a robust international footprint, and strong leadership in whole-of-government task force models—gives us the advantage against sophisticated criminal organizations.

My testimony today focuses on how this global threat environment is evolving along our northern border, how HSI is responding in concert with our domestic and foreign partners, and how new models of cooperation, including the recent executive order establishing the Homeland Security Task Forces (HSTF), have strengthened our ability to align investigations across DHS components and other agencies, and to dismantle dangerous criminal and terrorist networks as integrated targets.

The United States and Canada share more than 5,500 miles of land and waterways—the longest international border in the world—linking major ports of entry and trade corridors with vast stretches of rural farmland, forest, and water that are sparsely populated and difficult to patrol. Each day, lawful cross-border travel and commerce support a critical bilateral relationship and hundreds of billions of dollars in legitimate U.S.-Canada trade. Unfortunately, this trusted relationship and high volume of cross-border activity are exploited by transnational criminal organizations and drug cartels that use deception, trade fraud, and other illicit methods to move drugs, people, weapons, and illicit proceeds, often concealed within legitimate flows both into and out of the United States.

### **Drugs and Evolving Smuggling Methods**

Unique to the northern border, the flow of illicit drugs reflects both inbound and outbound dynamics. In 2024, Canadian law enforcement dismantled a series of fentanyl laboratories in Ontario, establishing Canada as an emerging source country rather than merely a transshipment point for illicit fentanyl. Since 2025, fentanyl-related investigations linked to Canadian production have tapered, and Canadian-produced fentanyl remains relatively low compared to seizures originating in Mexico. Even so, the fact that production exists on the Canadian side at all is a significant development. It means that HSI and our partners must now account for production, not just transit, as we assess northern-border risk.

The more dominant concern is the drug flow moving through the United States into Canada. Cartel-owned cocaine and other controlled substances are routed north for domestic consumption and onward shipment to Europe. In one 2026 HSTF case, HSI, working in partnership with the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and other Canadian law enforcement agencies, seized nearly half a ton of cocaine concealed in a commercial truck at the Blue Water Bridge in Michigan. The cocaine was believed to be headed to Toronto, a major hub for distribution and international transshipment. CBSA reports approximately 10,000 pounds of cocaine seized in

[its] FY 2025–26 and about 7,700 pounds in FY 2024–25; compared with roughly 2,700 pounds in FY 2020–21, that is an increase of about 275% over the last five years. Fentanyl seizures have increased 100% in the same timeframe. These increases underscore that the northern border remains a key vector for high-value narcotics tied to cartels and transnational criminal organizations.

### **Weapons Trafficking and Firearms Flows**

Drugs and weapons often move along the same routes and serve the same criminal markets. The northern border shares this trend, as weapons traffickers move shipments of firearms and ammunition through northern ports and rail lines. Between January 2025 and May 2026, HSI initiated 70 export-enforcement and firearms-trafficking investigations with a nexus to Canada, seizing more than 410 firearms and over 50,000 rounds of ammunition. These investigations resulted in 47 arrests, 31 indictments, and 9 convictions. While complex and often requiring multiyear efforts, they are critical to disrupting the procurement networks that arm violent criminal groups in both countries.

### **Critical Technology and Proliferation Threats**

Beyond handheld firearms, HSI investigates violations of counter-proliferation of controlled technology and dual-use items that can enhance the capabilities of foreign militaries and hostile actors. Criminal networks and foreign procurement agents sometimes use Canada as a transshipment point to obscure the true destination of sensitive U.S.-origin goods. In one such investigation, HSI and partner agencies arrested two suspects and seized approximately \$1.3 million worth of high-end Nvidia graphics processing unit servers from a freight forwarder in Texas. False documents, straw purchasers, and third-country intermediaries, including Canadian transit, were used to conceal China as the ultimate end-use location.

### **Human Smuggling and Exploitation**

While often using similar or identical methods such as narcotics and weapons smuggling, transnational criminal organizations (TCO) engaged in human smuggling advertise online, arrange fraudulent travel documents, and provide coaching on how to avoid detection, charging substantial fees for transportation and access to particular corridors. Human smuggling is inherently dangerous and can result in serious harm or death for those being smuggled. In 2025, experts in the HSI Forensic Laboratory provided critical testimony in a federal trial in Minnesota involving a large-scale TCO that transported migrants from Canada to the Chicago area. During that conspiracy, severe winter conditions and reckless disregard for human life in 2022 led to the deaths of four migrants, including two children. This case underscores the extreme risks posed by northern-border smuggling operations and the importance of holding organizers accountable when their actions result in the loss of life.

### **Fraud, Online Crime, and Child Exploitation**

TCO crimes also directly target and impact U.S. victims through fraud and exploitation. In one recent case, a Canada-based criminal organization was charged with operating call centers between 2021 and 2024 that targeted elderly victims in the United States by impersonating family members and officials and convincing them to send large amounts of currency. The currency was collected and converted into digital funds, which were then moved through Canadian financial channels. The scheme is believed to have defrauded U.S. victims of more than \$21 million. While ongoing, this joint investigation between HSI, the Internal Revenue

Service, and Canadian police agencies has already resulted in the arrest of multiple suspects in Canada, for whom the U.S. Department of Justice is pursuing extradition.

Even more reprehensible are the criminals who use online platforms, darknet chat rooms, and encrypted messaging that are central to the exploitation of children and to the child sexual abuse material that regularly crosses the Canadian-U.S. border. In recent years, HSI has seen a dramatic increase in tips, with reports from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children climbing into the hundreds of thousands. The HSI-led DHS Cyber Crimes Center combats this horrific threat through advanced analytics that triage priority cases, surface previously unseen material, and support rapid victim identification. Interagency liaisons from both HSI and Canadian agencies support U.S. and Canadian child exploitation centers to ensure proactive, timely sharing of leads.

In 2025, HSI partnered with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to target offenders who provide livestream access to child sexual assaults. That effort resulted in the review of more than 600 potential suspects and the acceptance of 44 investigative referrals by Canadian law enforcement. In another case, an undercover online investigation targeted an offender who claimed to be producing child sexual abuse material involving children under 13. HSI worked with local authorities in the Toronto area, who subsequently arrested a suspect in a position of public trust and rescued at least one minor child.

### **Money Laundering, Trade Fraud, and Illicit and Terrorist Financing**

The criminal activity described above generates substantial illicit proceeds that criminals seek to heavily launder or keep out of traditional financial institutions to avoid seizure. Bulk cash smuggling remains a core method, with criminal organizations transporting large amounts of currency in personal vehicles, commercial trucks, and luggage to avoid detection and reporting requirements.

Chinese money laundering organizations have become central players in these schemes. These networks operate sophisticated underground banking systems that use mirror trades, front companies, and trade-based mechanisms to convert bulk cash into seemingly legitimate funds. By pairing U.S.-based customers seeking to move money overseas with foreign customers seeking dollars, they move value across borders with little or no apparent contact with the formal banking system. Because they serve multiple criminal clients at once, including cartels and fraud rings, they are critical nodes in the illicit finance ecosystem.

To meet this challenge, HSI established the Cross-Border Financial Crimes Center (CBFCC) to lead and coordinate investigations of cross-border financial crime along the northern border in support of the HSTF. The Center works closely with the HSTF's National Coordination Center (NCC), other U.S. agencies, and international partners, including through the Five Eyes Money Laundering Community of Practice, to identify and dismantle networks that exploit U.S. and Canadian financial systems. These cases frequently combine bulk cash, Chinese-led money laundering organizations, trade fraud, and the misuse of digital assets, and they directly support the drug trafficking, human smuggling, and corruption we are confronting along the northern border.

In addition to cash and digital currencies, trade fraud remains a method to move and disguise illicit proceeds and is particularly relevant at the northern border given the volume of bilateral commerce. Illicit proceeds are often blended into legitimate trade through over- and

under-invoicing, phantom or mis declared shipments, diversion of duty-free commodities, and the use of front companies. For HSI, this is both an economic security issue, because it undermines fair competition and erodes tax and tariff collections, and a public health and safety issue, because the same techniques facilitate the importation of counterfeit medical devices and pharmaceuticals. The depth of the U.S.-Canada trade partnership has unfortunately been exploited by some bad-actors to bypass U.S. tariffs and regulations, serving as a place where corrupt companies and criminal organizations attempt to mislabel their products and hide their country of origin.

Beyond standard threats, trade fraud also masquerades as fine art, gemstones, and rare antiquities dealings. These high-value items are often fraudulently introduced into American commerce via fictitious documents of origin and can be sold through auction houses or independent dealers. For example, HSI special agents in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, developed a case against a Hizballah-linked financier who was supporting terrorism by laundering hundreds of millions of dollars through art and diamonds. The investigation led to the seizure of art, diamonds, and cash valued at more than \$5 million. This case demonstrates that trade-based schemes and the abuse of high-value commodities are not abstract financial crimes; they are direct funding mechanisms for organizations that threaten U.S. security and that of our allies, and they exploit the same trade lanes and financial institutions that underpin lawful cross-border commerce, including along our northern border.

### **International Offices, Tools, and Conclusion**

In closing, the northern border represents a region of deep trust and vital economic partnership between the United States and Canada, but that same trust and integration make it an attractive target for sophisticated criminal organizations. Whether we are confronting cartel-driven drug flows, weapons and technology diversion, human smuggling and exploitation, or complex trade-based fraud and illicit finance, HSI's approach is grounded in sustained, operational partnerships with our Canadian counterparts and a persistent presence on both sides of the border.

HSI maintains six offices across Canada, led by our Country Attaché in Ottawa and Assistant Attachés in Calgary, Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Halifax. These teams work every day with the Canada Border Services Agency, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and provincial and municipal police services to share intelligence, coordinate arrests and search operations, and run parallel financial and cyber investigations. HSI also works closely with CBP's International Operations and Advisory Directorate on Canada enforcement actions. That attaché footprint ensures that northern border threats are addressed as shared problems, not as separate U.S. or Canadian issues.

Within the United States, the HSTF framework integrates prior separate functions into one, (e.g. Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force or OCDETF and Border Enforcement Security Task Forces (BEST)) to serve as the unified body in this effort while funneling information to the NCC. HSTFs allow the United States government to synchronize complex investigations across agencies and jurisdictions, treating transnational criminal organizations as integrated targets rather than isolated cases. During the formation of the HSTF, redundant task forces, including OCDETF, were consolidated into the HSTF, bringing together federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian partners in key border communities to address day-to-day smuggling and enforcement challenges as a unified team. Together, these structures now operate as one,

supported by our attaché network and strong Canadian partnerships, giving the HSTF the ability to detect, disrupt, and dismantle networks that seek to exploit our northern border while preserving the lawful trade and travel that are so important to both nations. As we confront these threats, we ask for your continued support of HSI's mission, for the HSTF framework, and our attaché presence in Canada, which together form the core of our cross-border enforcement posture. We also ask for sustained investment in the financial, cyber, and data capabilities that allow our agents to follow money, technology, and online exploitation across borders and to move quickly from warning to action while protecting privacy and civil liberties. While we have made great progress under President Trump's leadership in confronting and defeating evolving threats, both HSI and the legislative branch must reject the temptation of complacency. HSI welcomes the opportunity to continue working with lawmakers to ensure we have the necessary authorities and funding to defend the nation from these threats.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.



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For a Hearing

BEFORE

The House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittees on Border Security and  
Enforcement, and Counterterrorism and Intelligence

ON

“Northern Exposure: Assessing the Evolving Threat Landscape at America’s Northern Border”

June 30, 2026  
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## **Introduction**

Chairman Guest, Chairman Pfluger, Ranking Member Correa, Ranking Member Magaziner, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. We are honored to represent the dedicated men and women of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), who work tirelessly to secure our nation's borders, facilitate lawful trade and travel, and uphold our laws. Our testimony today will focus on CBP's critical operations and strategic resource management along the Northern Border.

The Northern Border, spanning 5,525 miles across 13 states, is the longest international border in the world. CBP's operations across this domain are critical to America's national and economic security, inspecting millions of travelers and vehicles, and processing over \$800 billion in U.S.-Canada trade annually. Though often less publicized than the Southern Border, the Northern Border faces significant threats from narcotics trafficking, transnational criminal networks, human smuggling, and vulnerabilities within trade and travel systems. The problem reached its apogee between 2021 – 2025, with deadly drugs like fentanyl pouring through this border. The region's diverse geography—urban centers, remote areas, and vast waterways—presents unique operational demands. Our mission in this region is multifaceted: to safeguard our homeland, enforce immigration and trade laws, and ensure the efficient flow of lawful commerce and travel. This balance requires continuous evaluation and adaptation of our strategies and resources.

## **CBP's Operational Footprint on the Northern Border**

CBP's presence across the Northern Border is both extensive and diverse, reflecting the unique challenges of this vast region. This includes the Great Lakes maritime domain, which supports heavy traffic from commercial and private watercraft, and drives the regional economy. The Great Lakes maritime border contains 4,960 miles of U.S. shoreline, primarily consisting of commercial marinas, recreational watercraft launches, and private docks. Our operational footprint includes the ports of entry (POEs) managed by the Office of Field Operations (OFO), as well as the expansive areas between POEs safeguarded by the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) and Air and Marine Operations (AMO).

OFO maintains a robust presence across the Northern Border, operating 77 land POEs, 20 crossings, and 21 stations, totaling 118 locations. This extensive network is crucial for managing diverse traffic patterns and the unique challenges presented by the U.S.-Canada border. Our commitment to providing essential services remains steadfast as CBP continuously evaluates port utilization to align appropriate services and staffing with workload requirements. This ensures resources are deployed effectively to meet the high security standards, while facilitating legitimate trade and travel. As of Fiscal Year 2026, Quarter 2, the Northern Border is staffed to 95.9 percent of its allocated staffing level for CBP Officers. The Northern Border is expected to receive up to an additional 218 officer allocations through Working Families Tax Cut Act (WFTCA) funding.

USBP has eight regional sectors across our northern border comprised of 49 unique stations and is charged with securing approximately 5,500 miles of land and maritime borders between the United States and Canada. This mission is critical for intercepting illicit activities by transnational criminal and terrorist organizations, human traffickers, narcotics smugglers, and others who seek to harm our citizens and undermine our national security. The Northern Border,

with its remote wilderness, rugged terrain, and expansive waterways, including the sizeable Great Lakes region, presents unique and often dangerous situations for our agents. For example, the Swanton Sector encompasses approximately 24,000 square miles, including all of Vermont, New Hampshire, and several New York counties, with 295 miles of international boundary, 92 miles of which are water borders. Similarly, the Houlton Sector covers the entire State of Maine, with over 32,000 square miles, 299 miles of land border, 322 miles of riverine and lake border, and 3,478 miles of coastal border. These conditions necessitate innovative strategies, specialized resources, and close partnerships to effectively monitor and secure these regions. Each day, Border Patrol Agents assigned to the Northern Border rise to meet these challenges of terrain, environment, and limited resources.

AMO's Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch is responsible for Missouri, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, western Pennsylvania, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and western New York. This equates to over 410,000 square miles and 1,340 linear miles of water border with Canada. The Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch has marine units in Sault Ste. Marie, Port Huron, and Trenton, Michigan; Sandusky, Ohio; Erie, Pennsylvania; and Buffalo and Rochester, New York. Air Units are in Selfridge, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; and Buffalo, New York. It conducts air and marine operations that include border security and domain awareness and works with federal, state, and local counterparts to provide investigative support, high-risk warrant support, and security for National Special Security Events.

Further, AMO's National Air Security Operations Center–Grand Forks (NASOC–GF) operates fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft and unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) from Grand Forks Air Force Base. It conducts initial and recurrent UAS training and enforcement operations with manned and unmanned aircraft. Additionally, NASOC–GF aids in disaster relief and emergency response efforts of its federal, state, local, and tribal partners. NASOC–GF conducts land missions, spanning the northern land border of the United States and extending past the coastlines into the maritime domain.

### **Strategic Resource Management and Operational Efficiency via Technology**

Effective resource management is paramount to CBP's mission, particularly given the dynamic nature of border operations. CBP constantly evaluates operational statistics and efficiency at its POEs, stations, and branches to best allocate its limited resources. This strategic approach ensures that we can enforce legitimate trade and travel while also exercising fiscal responsibility.

#### *Working Families Tax Cut Act*

Funding provided through the WFTCA will enhance OFO efforts along the Northern Border by strengthening inspection, targeting, and enforcement capabilities at land ports of entry (LPOEs). The investment will support the acquisition and deployment of additional non-intrusive inspection (NII) technology, expanded targeting and analytical capabilities, modernized port infrastructure, and increased staffing for frontline inspection and enforcement operations. These resources will improve OFO's ability to detect and interdict narcotics, illicit currency, firearms, contraband, and other prohibited goods; identify individuals who may pose security risks; and address evolving transnational criminal threats. By improving screening efficiency and operational capacity at POEs, OFO will be better positioned to facilitate lawful trade and travel

while enhancing border security and supporting coordinated enforcement efforts with domestic and international partners along the U.S.-Canada border.

WFTCA funding will also strengthen USBP's ability to secure the Northern Border by expanding personnel, technology, mobility, and infrastructure in areas that present unique operational challenges. The investment will support the hiring, training, and deployment of additional Border Patrol Agents and support staff; enhance domain awareness through advanced surveillance systems, sensors, cameras, and unmanned aircraft; improve communications and operational mobility in remote and rugged environments; and provide resources for facilities, vehicles, and other mission-support requirements. These enhancements will help Border Patrol detect, identify, and respond to unlawful cross-border activity more effectively, including narcotics smuggling, human trafficking, transnational criminal activity, and other threats, while facilitating coordination with federal, state, local, tribal, and international law enforcement partners along the nearly 5,500-mile U.S.-Canada border.

Finally, WFTCA funding will bolster AMO's ability to fortify the Northern Border by enhancing aerial and maritime surveillance, interdiction, and rapid-response capabilities. These investments will support additional personnel, aircraft, vessels, and operational technology, enabling AMO to expand domain awareness and increase support to USBP, OFO, and law enforcement partners. Enhanced air and maritime capabilities will improve the detection and interdiction of narcotics trafficking, human smuggling, and other transnational criminal activity across the vast and diverse Northern Border environment.

#### *Northern Border Technology Deployment*

OFO extensively utilizes NII technology along the Northern Border to enhance security and facilitate lawful trade at POEs. These advanced systems, including X-ray and gamma-ray imaging, allow officers to "see" inside conveyances such as passenger vehicles, commercial trucks, and railcars without physically opening them. This capability enables the rapid detection of anomalies that may indicate illicit narcotics, contraband, or other threats, significantly improving efficiency and safety for both officers and the traveling public. The deployment of NII systems minimizes delays for legitimate trade and travel, ensuring that critical economic activities are not unduly hampered. This technological investment is vital for maintaining a secure border while supporting the substantial flow of goods and people that characterize the U.S.-Canada relationship. By leveraging NII technology, CBP can conduct thorough inspections quickly, interdict suspected dangerous materials and maintain the critical flow of lawful goods and travelers across the border.

USBP is significantly enhancing Northern Border security through a technology-driven approach known as Autonomous Persistent Surveillance (APS), which combines Artificial Intelligence (AI), sensors, and communications to provide continuous situational awareness and support Border Patrol Agents. This includes the deployment of AI-driven Autonomous Surveillance Towers, with a target of 550 new and retrofitted towers designed to automatically distinguish real incursions from environmental movement in real time. Complementing these are 134 Autonomous Mobile Surveillance Systems, 17 of which are deployed on the Northern Border, alongside 871 miles of Linear Ground Detection Systems, with 100 miles specifically on the Northern Border. Further technological advancements include 30 miles of Cross Border Tunnel

Threat detection, 2 Mobile Detection Tunnel Toolkits, and over 21,000 new LTE-enabled Land Mobile Radios, with 1,900 allocated to the Northern Border. This shift from reactive to proactive operations means automated detection and identification free agents from constant manual monitoring, allowing them to focus on targeted interdiction and apprehension. Central to this strategy is Domain Awareness, achieved through the Operational Picture for Tactical Intelligence and Control (OPTIC) platform. OPTIC is a cloud-based system that unifies sensor data and analytics, provides a near-real-time Common Operating Picture, and delivers data fusion, automated decision support, and autonomous sensor command-and-control with operator override. This human-led, technology-enabled approach ensures that while AI and autonomous systems identify and characterize threats, trained Border Patrol agents retain final decision-making authority, leveraging enhanced, timely, and actionable intelligence as a force multiplier.

### **Key Enforcement Operations and Trends**

While often overshadowed by activity along the Southwest Border, the Northern Border presents its own unique challenges. CBP employs targeted enforcement operations and continuously monitors trends to adapt its strategies.

#### *OFO Operational Trends and Enforcement Activity*

In Fiscal Year 2025, OFO upheld its mission to safeguard America by enforcing border security, customs, and immigration laws across the Northern Border. Leveraging advanced technology, intelligence-driven strategies, and the expertise of its personnel, OFO officers processed over 56 million travelers and nearly 25 million conveyances, ensuring both the enforcement of lawful trade and travel and maintaining comprehensive security. OFO's effective operations led to the seizure of 10,853 pounds of narcotics along the Northern Border in FY 2025, representing a significant 51% increase from the 7,176 pounds intercepted in FY 2024.

- **Flagpoling:** Unlike the Southwest Border, Northern Border enforcement encounters mainly occur at POEs versus between POEs. The Northern Border saw declines in enforcement encounters following a January 2025 Executive Order; however, this decline is also likely attributed to the Government of Canada implementing restrictive immigration policies—most notably changes in rules for “flagpoling” in December 2024. Flagpoling occurs when foreign nationals who hold temporary resident status in Canada, leave Canada and, after a visit to the United States or St. Pierre and Miquelon, re-enter to access immigration services at a Canadian POE. CBP notes a sharp decrease in individuals flagpoling at Northern Border POEs; however, flagpoling flows remain as there are exceptions in the policy, allowing for truck drivers and certain professionals/technicians covered under trade agreements.
- **Operation Motor City:** In June 2025, Operation Motor City was a targeted enforcement operation within the Detroit Field Office aimed at disrupting narcotics and illicit contraband smuggling through specific POEs. Data collected, including information from Confidential Human Source handlers, was shared with the Port Intelligence and Analytical Unit and the Field Intelligence and Analytical Unit to develop additional targets and analyze violators. An Evidence Collection Team was utilized to lift latent prints from conveyances, compartments, narcotics packaging, and illicit contraband. Operation Motor City culminated in 9 seizures totaling 341.94 lbs. of cocaine and federal prosecution of the Indian national driver, \$153,491 USD in undeclared currency, 58,202

lbs. of loose tobacco, and the seizure of jewelry after U.S. Fish & Wildlife verified its origin from elephant ivory.

- **Operation Northern Lights:** Developed in response to significant narcotics seizures by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) north of the Sweetgrass, Montana POE, Operation Northern Lights (ONL) was conducted in September 2025. This operation targeted narcotics and illicit contraband smuggling northbound to Canada. Intelligence gathered during ONL led to an inbound seizure of stolen and misappropriated Native American artifacts and a subsequent criminal investigation. ONL demonstrated OFO's ability to apply enforcement actions in critical areas, even where low staffing typically restricts such attention without high financial cost.
- **U.S. Citizen Wanted for Felony Child Abuse:** On April 29, 2026, CBP officers encountered a 48-year-old male United States citizen returning from Canada and operating a vehicle registered in Pennsylvania. During the inspection, CBP officers discovered a National Crime Information Center match indicating he had an active arrest warrant for assaulting a child. CBP officers escorted the man to a secondary inspection area and confirmed that the arrest warrant issued by the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office remained active and verified that he was the subject of that warrant.

#### *USBP Operational Trends and Enforcement Activity*

In Fiscal Year 2025, USBP Northern Border apprehensions declined to 7,829 after reaching record levels in Fiscal Year 2023 (10,021) and Fiscal Year 2024 (23,718), with aliens entering between the POEs from Canada. These historic flows were largely driven by apprehensions of Indian and Mexican nationals who abused Canada's lenient visa policies. Following Canada's reinstatement of visa requirements for Mexican nationals and changes to their visa policies for Indian nationals, USBP began seeing decreases in apprehensions in the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2025. Additionally, in Fiscal Year 2024, USBP seized 4,400 pounds of narcotics, including 4,012 pounds of marijuana, 127 pounds of methamphetamine, 90 pounds of ecstasy, 32 pounds of fentanyl, and 21 pounds of cocaine, along the Northern Border. This number increased to 5,700 pounds in Fiscal Year 2025—an increase of over 29 percent—including 3,440 pounds of marijuana, 113 pounds of cocaine, 100 pounds of methamphetamine, 76 pounds of fentanyl, and 1 pound of ecstasy.

- **Apprehension of Tren de Aragua Member:** On July 28, 2025, U.S. Border Patrol agents arrested an illegal alien from Venezuela who is a member of the Tren de Aragua gang during a traffic stop in the metro Detroit area. Marysville Station agents responded to a request from law enforcement partners in Shelby Township, who had stopped a vehicle displaying a fraudulent license plate. The vehicle was occupied by three Venezuelan nationals. Record checks conducted by Border Patrol agents revealed all three individuals were illegally present in the United States. One of the individuals was identified as a member of Tren de Aragua, a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. Additional record checks of the 30-year-old male Tren de Aragua member revealed multiple charges since 2023, including weapons violations, immigration violations, and violent robbery.
- **Apprehension of Venezuelan Man wanted for Homicide:** On July 7, 2025, U.S. Border Patrol agents arrested a Venezuelan illegal alien wanted for homicide in his home country. Agents from the Gibraltar Station responded to a request for assistance, Wednesday from law enforcement partners in Lincoln Park, Michigan, who had stopped a

man driving without a license. Record checks revealed the individual to be Franh Enrique Yonkaiker Machado-Rivas, 27, who is wanted in connection with a homicide investigation in Venezuela. Machado-Rivas admitted to agents that he was in the U.S. illegally.

### **Executive Actions to Enhance Northern Border Security**

With the support of recent Presidential directives, CBP is working with DHS, the Department of Justice, and the Department of State partners to enhance Northern Border security. This includes modernizing technology, streamlining operations, and improving interagency coordination.

- **Securing our Borders:** Executive Order 14165 increases personnel, deploys advanced technology, and upgrades infrastructure to combat illegal crossings, human trafficking, and contraband smuggling.
- **Strengthening Customs Enforcement:** Executive Order 14411 targets forced labor and unfair trade practices, expands Withhold Release Orders (WROs), and boosts international coordination.
- **Protecting the American People Against Invasion:** Executive Order 14159 establishes an interagency task force to disrupt smuggling networks through intelligence sharing and community engagement.
- **Amendment to Duties to Address the Flow of Illicit Drugs Across Our Northern Border:** Executive Order 14325 invests in advanced surveillance, biometric systems, and port upgrades to ensure secure and efficient trade and travel.
- **Suspending Duty-Free Minimis Treatment for All Countries:** President Trump's July 30, 2025, Executive Order 14324, suspending the de minimis exemption empowers CBP to better detect and block high-risk shipments, strengthening efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking and protect national security. This requires duties on low-value imports to prevent customs evasion and illicit goods entry.

### **Intelligence and Coordination on the Northern Border**

CBP employs sophisticated intelligence and coordination mechanisms to enhance security and operational effectiveness along the Northern Border. These efforts are critical for understanding and countering evolving threats.

Currently, CBP operates the Northern Border Coordination Center (NBCC), a forward-deployed, centralized coordination center for USBP. Located at Selfridge Air National Guard Base (ANGB) near Detroit, Michigan, the NBCC serves as a vital hub for information sharing, intelligence, training, domain awareness, and stakeholder engagement. It collaborates with federal, state, tribal, local, and international government partners across the entire northern border of the United States. The NBCC provides a wide range of services for Sector Intelligence Units, including law enforcement intelligence system administration and training, analytical support, and digital forensic and Document and Media Exploitation support. It also produces regional-level strategic threat and intelligence assessments, focusing primarily on counterterrorism and transnational organized crime activities. Furthermore, the NBCC maintains expertise on northern border threats between the POEs and exploits all-source classified information and intelligence to counter these threats.

Building upon these capabilities, CBP's Office of Intelligence (OI) is coordinating with OFO in Detroit and the USBP Detroit Sector, with support from AMO, to establish the Northern Border Intelligence Center (NBIC). This fusion center, like the Southern Border Intelligence Center in Tucson, Arizona, will integrate intelligence from across the Northern Border, spanning from Washington to Maine. The NBIC will incorporate intelligence from all CBP components—OI, OFO, USBP, and AMO—as well as federal, state, and local partners. This initiative will adopt a multi-campus approach, initially locating assets and personnel at Selfridge ANGB, with vital integration pieces involving partners in Detroit, Michigan. The Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations bill provided \$3 million for the establishment of the NBIC, which CBP is utilizing to construct a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility at Selfridge ANGB, serving as the starting point for this critical intelligence hub.

Additionally, CBP is actively engaged within the Homeland Security Task Force (HSTF) with the understanding that the integration of all law enforcement components is essential to defeat transnational criminal or foreign terrorist organization (TCO/FTO) activity. Similarly, CBP is engaged within the National Coordination Center (NCC) recognizing the value in deconfliction and synchronization of enforcement and investigative efforts across the Northern Border and beyond. This integrated approach is essential to the continued facilitation of lawful trade and travel while simultaneously advancing our national and economic security.

### **Collaborative Engagement with Stakeholders**

Collaboration is the foundation of effective border management, especially on the Northern Border.

#### *Joint Operations with Canada*

Working in partnership with our Canadian counterparts has long been a cornerstone of CBP's Northern Border strategy. In Fiscal Year 2025, USBP conducted 31 joint operations with Canadian law enforcement agencies, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the CBSA. These operations included a wide range of activities, from mirrored patrols on land and water to intelligence-sharing initiatives and bi-national maritime enforcement efforts. By leveraging the expertise and resources of both nations, we can address shared threats more effectively. One promising initiative is the Integrated Cross-Border Maritime Law Enforcement Operations program, commonly known as Shiprider. This program allows U.S. and Canadian law enforcement officers to operate jointly in each other's territorial waters, enhancing our ability to pursue and interdict threats. Cross-border enforcement actions conducted under this program have led to the seizure of firearms, narcotics, and other dangerous contraband. OFO continuously engages with the CBSA, fostering a strong partnership that facilitates coordinated border operations and close collaboration on operational details surrounding changes to port hours, ensuring seamless communication and minimizing disruptions. This ongoing coordination is crucial for optimizing resource allocation and maintaining consistent service levels across the shared border. By aligning operational hours, both agencies can more effectively manage traffic flows and enhance security bilaterally. This collaborative approach ensures that resources are strategically deployed, allowing both countries to address shared threats more efficiently and coordinate efforts in areas such as returning inadmissible aliens. Ultimately, this close partnership supports both national security objectives and the economic prosperity driven by legitimate cross-border commerce and tourism.

OFO also participated in the inaugural Northern Land Border Binational Infrastructure Forum on October 30, 2024, in Washington, DC, led by the Office of Facilities and Asset Management (OFAM). OFO provided mid-year comments for the Spring 2025 check-in between the OFAM Assistant Commissioner and the CBSA Vice President. Under the IIA, OFO is working with OFAM to finalize plans with CBSA for land preclearance operations at Alcan, Alaska. This initiative enhances binational security presence, enables efficient use of infrastructure funding by both nations, aligns with an increased collaborative vision for LPOEs, and enhances border and law enforcement presence in a remote location.

### *Domestic Stakeholder Engagement*

Beyond our international partners, CBP actively works with local stakeholders and communities. This engagement ensures consistent communication is maintained and feedback is received. This collaborative approach allows CBP to adapt its operations to local needs while upholding national security and travel and trade facilitation objectives. CBP's communication presence across Northern Border communities is enhanced through clear, consistent, and accessible public outreach. This increases public understanding of CBP's border security mission and how Northern Border communities play a direct role in supporting national safety measures. We empower residents to act as force multipliers by encouraging responsible reporting of suspicious activity and emphasizing how local vigilance helps deter criminal operations before they reach interior communities. CBP already receives valuable intelligence from public reporting, which has been critical in stopping smuggling and drug trafficking along the Northern Border. Border security is strongest when CBP and communities work side by side. Tribal nations, local governments, and residents are trusted partners in safeguarding the Northern Border.

### **Challenges and Needs**

While significant progress has been made, CBP continues to pursue opportunities to strengthen the security of our Northern Border. First, continued collaboration with Canadian authorities is critical. By expanding joint operations, enhancing intelligence-sharing capabilities, and fostering deeper integration of resources, we can more effectively address the shared threats that impact both nations. Second, investments in technology, such as NII and APS, are vital to improving our ability to monitor and secure remote areas of the border. These technologies will allow us to detect and track illicit activity in areas that are currently difficult to monitor due to terrain or resource limitations. Third, increased resources – including additional Border Patrol agents – are necessary to maintain a robust presence at key locations, including international railroad bridges, marinas, and the Great Lakes region.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, CBP's operations on the Northern Border are characterized by a commitment to security, efficiency, and collaboration. Our extensive network of POEs and areas between them, coupled with strategic resource management, robust intelligence capabilities, and strong partnerships, enables effective management of this critical region. We continuously evaluate our operations, making data-driven decisions to optimize resource allocation and ensure the seamless flow of legitimate trade and travel, all while properly safeguarding our homeland.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.



United States Government Accountability Office

Testimony Before the Subcommittees on  
Border Security and Enforcement and  
Counterterrorism and Intelligence,  
Committee on Homeland Security,  
House of Representatives

For Release on Delivery  
Expected at 2 p.m. EDT  
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# NORTHERN BORDER SECURITY

## Additional Actions Needed to Ensure Sufficient CBP Staffing and Improve Performance Measurement

Statement of Heather MacLeod, Director,  
Homeland Security and Justice



### Additional Actions Needed to Ensure Sufficient CBP Staffing and Improve Performance Measurement

GAO-26-109195

June 30, 2026

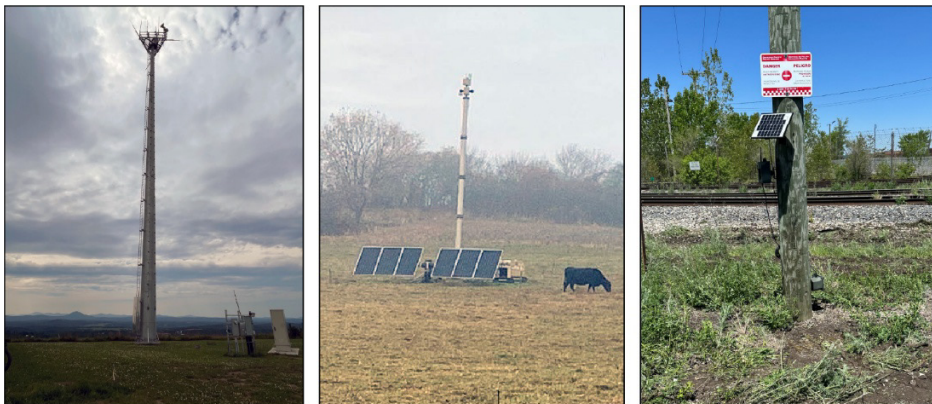
A testimony before the Subcommittees on Border Security and Enforcement and Counterterrorism and Intelligence, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Contact: Heather MacLeod at [MacLeodH@gao.gov](mailto:MacLeodH@gao.gov)

#### What GAO Found

U.S. Border Patrol and Air and Marine Operations (AMO), within U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), are responsible for securing U.S. borders between ports of entry in the land, air, and maritime environments. CBP uses aircraft, vessels, and surveillance technology—such as cameras, radar sites, and sensors—in its efforts to secure the northern border (see figure). CBP also participates in task forces with other agencies such as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to support its efforts. From fiscal year 2019 through fiscal 2024, Border Patrol apprehensions along the northern border increased, with sharp increases in 2023 and 2024. Apprehensions subsequently decreased in fiscal year 2025 and have generally remained consistent at these reduced levels as of April 2026, according to CBP's publicly reported data.

#### Examples of U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Surveillance Technology Along the Northern Border



Photographs depict a Northern Border Remote Video Surveillance System (left), an Autonomous Surveillance Tower (middle), and an unattended ground sensor (right).

Source: GAO (left photo); U.S. Border Patrol (middle and right photos). | GAO-26-109195

GAO [previously reported](#) that CBP has faced longstanding challenges addressing staffing gaps. In [2026](#), GAO found that the number of Border Patrol agents on the northern border decreased from fiscal year 2019 through fiscal year 2024. Although the number of authorized agents increased, the number of agents assigned to and working in these sectors decreased by about 6 percent. There was also a decrease in the staffing rate for Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialists who monitor surveillance technology. GAO recommended that CBP develop and implement a plan to address this staffing gap, which could help the agency better carry out its responsibilities.

In [2019](#), GAO found that CBP did not have measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. Border Patrol had performance measures that assessed security in remote areas, but the measures did not include data from maritime border areas. Two AMO measures included data across all border areas and were not specific to the northern border. GAO recommended that Border Patrol and AMO each develop and implement such measures to better assess operations on the northern border.

#### Why GAO Did This Study

CBP, within the Department of Homeland Security, has primary responsibility for securing the nearly 4,000-mile border between the U.S. and Canada. Key security threats along the northern border include terrorism, contraband smuggling—specifically, the bidirectional flow of illicit drugs—and violations of U.S. immigration law such as migrant smuggling.

CBP received billions of dollars in the 2025 law commonly known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act and the 2026 Secure America Act to hire and train additional personnel. According to CBP, the One Beautiful Bill Act funding alone will support hiring an additional 5,000 CBP officers, 3,000 Border Patrol agents, and 200 AMO agents.

This statement is based primarily on GAO's [June 2019](#) and [February 2026](#) reports. It discusses CBP's (1) resources across the northern border, (2) staffing in the region and related challenges, and (3) performance measures for assessing its effectiveness at securing the northern border.

#### What GAO Recommends

GAO made a total of three recommendations to CBP in the 2019 and 2026 reports to help address challenges related to staffing gaps and measuring the effectiveness of Border Patrol's and AMO's efforts to secure the northern border. The Department of Homeland Security agreed with GAO's recommendations.

CBP has taken some steps to address the recommendations but has not yet fully implemented them. GAO will continue to monitor CBP's progress in implementing these recommendations.

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Chairmen Guest and Pfluger, Ranking Members Correa and Magaziner, and Members of the Subcommittees:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss GAO's work examining U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) operations and resources at the northern border. The U.S. and Canada share the longest common non-militarized border between two countries, spanning nearly 4,000 miles of land and maritime borders. CBP, within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), has the primary responsibility for securing U.S. borders at and between ports of entry.<sup>1</sup> U.S. Border Patrol and Air and Marine Operations (AMO) are CBP subcomponents responsible for securing U.S. borders between ports of entry in the land, air, and maritime environments.

In 2025, CBP received \$4.1 billion in Public Law 119-21, commonly known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, available until September 30, 2029, to hire and train additional CBP agents and officers, rehired annuitants, and field support personnel.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, the CBP Commissioner testified that the act supports the agency's hiring goals by funding an additional 5,000 CBP officers, 3,000 Border Patrol agents, and 200 AMO agents.<sup>3</sup> In June 2026, the Secure America Act provided CBP appropriations available through September 30, 2029, of \$9.55 billion to hire, pay, train, and equip Border Patrol agents and support personnel, and over \$13 billion to hire, pay, train, and equip CBP agents and necessary support staff (and for CBP mission support, operations and maintenance).<sup>4</sup>

Key security threats along the northern border include terrorism, contraband smuggling—specifically, the bidirectional flow of illicit drugs—

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<sup>1</sup>CBP's Office of Field Operations conducts immigration and customs inspections at ports of entry to prevent the illicit entry of travelers, cargo, merchandise, and other items. This statement focuses on CBP's activities between ports of entry.

<sup>2</sup>See An Act to provide for reconciliation pursuant to title II of H. Con. Res. 14, Pub. L. No. 119-21, title IX, subtitle A, § 90002(a)(1), 139 Stat. 72, 358. The act also provided CBP over \$2 billion, available until September 30, 2029, to provide recruitment bonuses, performance awards, or annual retention bonuses to eligible CBP officers and agents.

<sup>3</sup>Rodney S. Scott, Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Oversight of the Department of Homeland Security: ICE, CBP, and USCIS*, testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security, 119th Cong., 2nd sess., February 10, 2026.

<sup>4</sup>Pub. L. No. 119-98, title I, § 101, title II, § 201, 140 Stat. 837, 837 & 839.

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and violations of U.S. immigration law such as migrant smuggling.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Border Patrol has reported other threats between ports of entry that affect border security operations along the northern border. For example, the number of vehicle incursions into and out of the U.S. increased by 540 percent from fiscal year 2021 through fiscal year 2024.<sup>6</sup> In addition, drones—small unmanned aircraft systems—can smuggle illicit drugs and firearms.

Border Patrol's area of responsibility along the northern border is divided among eight sectors: Blaine, Spokane, Havre, Grand Forks, Detroit, Buffalo, Swanton, and Houlton.<sup>7</sup> Border Patrol agents patrol international land borders and waterways to detect and prevent the illegal movement of people, narcotics, and contraband into the U.S. Agents rely on nonuniformed personnel for mission support duties, including communications, surveillance, and other administrative tasks.

AMO operations along the northern border are divided among three branches that constitute its Northern Region: Bellingham Air and Marine Branch in Washington, Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch in Michigan, and Manassas Air Branch in Virginia.<sup>8</sup> AMO air interdiction agents pilot airplanes, helicopters, and drones, while aviation enforcement agents conduct airborne law enforcement operations, such as operating sensors, executing warrants, and seizing evidence. Marine interdiction agents command and crew vessels and conduct maritime patrols.

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<sup>5</sup>See GAO, *U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Resources Deployed and Challenges Faced in Securing the Northern Border*, [GAO-26-107501](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 12, 2026).

<sup>6</sup>CBP defines a vehicle incursion as the unauthorized crossing of a vehicle over the international boundary of the United States at a place other than at an open port of entry. U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Emergency Driving Including Vehicular Pursuits by U.S. Customs and Border Protection Personnel*, Directive No. 4510-26 (January 2021). Border Patrol reported 48 vehicle incursions in fiscal year 2021, and in fiscal year 2024, the number of vehicle incursions increased to 307.

<sup>7</sup>Border Patrol sectors along the northern border are further divided into 49 total stations, with each station assigned a certain geographic area of responsibility within the sector.

<sup>8</sup>Each AMO branch is further divided into units to conduct air or maritime missions, and there are a total of seven air units and nine marine units along the northern border. Manassas Air Branch, the New York Air Unit, and the Chicago Air Unit are part of the Northern Region but do not generally operate along the northern border. In addition, the National Air Security Operations Center-Grand Forks, located in North Dakota, operates as an air unit and provides training for operating drones (i.e., unmanned aircraft systems).

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In addition, CBP participates in task forces with federal, tribal, state, and local agencies—including U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations—to support its efforts to secure the northern border between ports of entry. For example, Border Patrol and AMO agents are assigned as task force officers along the northern border on the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement-led Border Enforcement Security Task Forces to identify, investigate, disrupt, and dismantle transnational criminal organizations.<sup>9</sup> According to Border Patrol and AMO officials, task force officers help enhance partnerships, information sharing, and situational awareness along the northern border.

My statement today discusses the results of our 2019 and 2026 reports on CBP’s northern border activities.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, this statement discusses (1) CBP data on apprehensions, use of assets and surveillance technology, and drug seizures along the northern border, (2) the extent to which CBP’s staffing along the northern border changed since fiscal year 2019 and the steps it has taken to address any challenges, and (3) the extent to which CBP has developed and implemented performance measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border.

For the 2019 and 2026 reports, we analyzed CBP, Border Patrol, and AMO policies, documentation, and data, and we interviewed officials from agency headquarters and selected field locations. More detailed information on our scope and methodology, including analyzing data and determining a sufficient level of reliability for our reporting, can be found in the reports. For this statement, we also reviewed information on the status of agency implementation of our prior recommendations.

We conducted the work on 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.

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<sup>9</sup>See 6 U.S.C. § 240.

<sup>10</sup>See [GAO-26-107501](#) and GAO, *Northern Border Security: CBP Identified Resource Challenges but Needs Performance Measures to Assess Security Between Ports of Entry*, [GAO-19-740](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 26, 2019).

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## Apprehensions and Aircraft, Vessels, and Surveillance Technology Use Increased from Fiscal Year 2019 to Fiscal Year 2024

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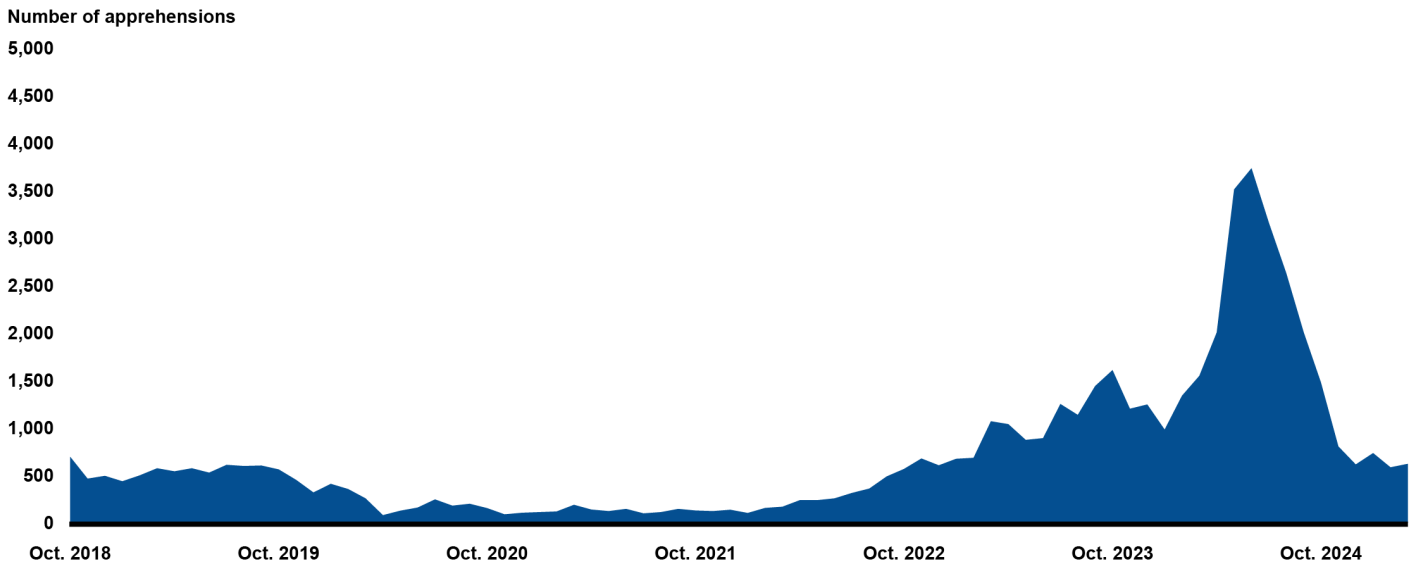
### Total Border Patrol Apprehensions Increased from Fiscal Year 2019 to Fiscal Year 2024 and Varied Across Sectors

In February 2026, we found that the total number of Border Patrol apprehensions along the northern border between ports of entry increased from fiscal year 2019 through fiscal year 2024, with sharp increases in 2023 and 2024 and a subsequent decrease for the first 6 months of fiscal year 2025 (see fig. 1).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>For the purposes of this statement, the term “apprehension” refers to an enforcement action by Border Patrol to physically control or temporarily detain any persons (noncitizens or U.S. citizens) encountered between ports of entry based on suspected violation of federal law, including laws governing entry into the U.S. DHS documentation we reviewed for our underlying report used the terms “alien,” “migrant,” and “noncitizen” interchangeably. For readability, we generally use the term “noncitizen” or “foreign national” to refer to an “alien,” which is defined by statute as any person who is not a citizen or national of the U.S., except when quoting language in statute, regulation, or executive orders that use the term “alien.” 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(3). See [GAO-26-107501](#).

**Figure 1: Monthly U.S. Border Patrol Apprehensions Along the Northern Border Between Ports of Entry, Fiscal Year 2019 Through the Second Quarter of Fiscal Year 2025**



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Border Patrol data. | GAO-26-109195

Notes: In this statement, an apprehension is the physical control or temporary detainment of any person encountered by Border Patrol between ports of entry for suspected violation of U.S. law. Fiscal year 2025 apprehensions reported for October 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025.

According to data on CBP’s public website, Border Patrol apprehensions along the northern border remained generally consistent at these reduced levels from April 2025 through April 2026, the most recent data available.<sup>12</sup>

In particular, our analysis showed that the total number of apprehensions increased from 6,618 in fiscal year 2019 to 24,968 in fiscal year 2024.<sup>13</sup> The Swanton and Blaine sectors had the greatest increase in

<sup>12</sup>This analysis is based on encounter data released publicly by CBP. In contrast to other analyses in this statement, CBP officials stated these data include only apprehended individuals who are subject to deportation; our other analyses included all non-permanent resident foreign nationals and U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents apprehended by one of Border Patrol’s eight sectors along the northern border.

<sup>13</sup>These figures include non-permanent resident foreign nationals and U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents. While U.S. citizens are not subject to statutory admissibility restrictions (i.e., inadmissibility) applicable to noncitizens, Border Patrol may enforce U.S. law against U.S. citizens for criminal offenses or non-immigration civil violations. 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a) (grounds of inadmissibility applicable to noncitizens); regarding CBP officer and agent law enforcement authority, see, e.g., 8 U.S.C. § 1357 (powers of immigration officers and employees); 19 U.S.C. § 1589a (enforcement authority of customs officers).

apprehensions during this period. Apprehensions in the other six sectors combined decreased by 49 percent, from 4,455 apprehensions in fiscal year 2019 to 2,255 apprehensions in fiscal year 2024. Table 1 shows the number of apprehensions for Border Patrol’s northern border sectors and the percentage change for each sector during this period.

**Table 1: Total Number of Apprehensions in U.S. Border Patrol’s Northern Border Sectors, Fiscal Year (FY) 2019–2024**

<b>Border Patrol Sector</b>	<b>FY 2019</b>	<b>FY 2020</b>	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>	<b>FY 2024</b>	<b>Percentage change FY 2019–2024</b>
Blaine	600	290	169	454	1,604	2,940	390%
Buffalo	736	374	131	107	319	508	-31%
Detroit	1,767	760	310	318	651	718	-59%
Grand Forks	693	360	122	93	331	281	-59%
Havre	209	75	91	86	88	109	-48%
Houlton	425	361	222	424	448	472	11%
Spokane	625	306	75	96	200	167	-73%
Swanton	1,563	822	413	1,134	7,265	19,773	1,165%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,618</b>	<b>3,348</b>	<b>1,533</b>	<b>2,712</b>	<b>10,906</b>	<b>24,968</b>	<b>277%</b>

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Border Patrol data. | GAO-26-109195

Border Patrol officials told us that the increase in apprehensions along the northern border for fiscal years 2023 and 2024 can be partially attributed to individuals without valid travel documents seeking entry into the U.S. from Canada after entering that country under its Electronic Travel Authorization system.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, Border Patrol officials stated that many foreign nationals who did not have valid travel documents to enter the U.S. traveled to Canada first and then attempted to enter the U.S. during this period. Border Patrol attributed the subsequent decline in apprehensions along the northern border after June 2024 to border enforcement policies intended to discourage individuals from seeking illegal entry into the U.S.

<sup>14</sup>Canada’s Electronic Travel Authorization is an entry requirement for visa-exempt foreign nationals travelling to Canada by air. The authorization costs \$7 (Canadian) to apply. The authorization provides an affordable option for individuals to enter Canada, and, according to Border Patrol officials, once in Canada, these individuals may decide to enter the U.S. between ports of entry.

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## CBP's Use of Aircraft, Vessels, and Surveillance Technology Along the Northern Border Increased from Fiscal Year 2019 to Fiscal Year 2024

We found that CBP increased the number of hours aircraft and marine vessels operated from fiscal year 2019 through fiscal year 2024 across the northern region, while the number of aircraft and marine vessels available to CBP decreased slightly during those years. During this same period, CBP increased the deployment of land-based surveillance technology across the northern border, including camera towers and unattended ground sensors.

**AMO air and marine vessels.** The number of hours that AMO operated aircraft and marine vessels increased. Specifically, our analysis of AMO data showed that the number of hours AMO spent in the air (i.e., flight hours) focused on enforcement activities along the northern border increased about 7 percent from about 7,800 in fiscal year 2019 to 8,300 in fiscal year 2024.<sup>15</sup> In addition, we found that the number of hours that AMO marine vessels operated (i.e., float hours) focused on enforcement activities along the northern border varied for fiscal years 2019 through 2024. Overall, the number of float hours along the northern border increased from about 3,900 in fiscal year 2019 to 4,600 in fiscal year 2024—an increase of about 17 percent.

Even though the number of AMO flight and float hours generally increased along the northern border, the number of AMO aircraft and vessels available to AMO agents along the northern border decreased from fiscal year 2019 through fiscal year 2024. In April 2019, AMO units along the northern border had 13 planes, 16 helicopters, and three unmanned aircraft systems. In October 2024, these units had 11 planes, 15 helicopters, and two unmanned aircraft systems. Overall, this was a decrease of four aircraft.<sup>16</sup> The number of marine vessels along the northern border decreased slightly from 28 in fiscal year 2019 to 27 in fiscal year 2024. The number of vessels equipped to operate on rivers decreased from 66 in October 2019 to 59 in August 2024.<sup>17</sup>

**CBP land-based surveillance.** Border Patrol has increased the deployment of land-based surveillance technology along the northern

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<sup>15</sup>These flight and float hour calculations include time spent on enforcement activities and exclude other activities, such as training and maintenance.

<sup>16</sup>Aircraft counts include National Air Security Operations-Grand Forks, which is not part of AMO's Northern Region but operates along the northern border. These counts exclude aircraft assigned to Manassas Air Branch, Chicago Air Unit, and New York Air Unit. Although they are subordinate to AMO's Northern Region, these units do not generally operate along the northern border.

<sup>17</sup>These riverine vessels are owned by AMO but operated by Border Patrol.

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border—namely, camera towers and sensors. Specifically, from the end of fiscal year 2019 to the end of fiscal year 2024, Border Patrol deployed 28 additional camera towers and 1,450 additional unattended ground sensors along the northern border.<sup>18</sup> Land-based surveillance technology encompasses several types of systems. For example, Northern Border Remote Video Surveillance Systems provide surveillance in the Great Lakes environment. The systems utilize tower- or structure-mounted day and night (infrared) cameras and, in some cases, have radar capabilities. Autonomous Surveillance Towers are a newer technology system that is capable of autonomously detecting, identifying, and tracking illicit cross-border activity.<sup>19</sup> In addition, flat-panel radar sites provide Border Patrol with maritime detection capabilities in the Great Lakes region.

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## Drug Seizures Along the Northern Border Varied and Firearms and Currency Seizures Increased from Fiscal Year 2019 to Fiscal Year 2024

**Drug seizures.** We found that the total number of Border Patrol drug seizure events fluctuated year to year, but overall, they increased by about 6 percent from fiscal year 2019 to fiscal year 2024.<sup>20</sup> In particular, our data analysis showed that Border Patrol was involved in 958 drug seizure events in fiscal year 2019 compared with 1,012 drug seizure events in fiscal year 2024.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Border Patrol was involved in 566 drug seizure events in the first two quarters of fiscal year 2025. Table 2 shows the total number of Border Patrol’s drug seizure events along the northern border from fiscal year 2019 to March 31, 2025 (which marked the end of quarter 2 of fiscal year 2025).

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<sup>18</sup>Unattended ground sensors are remotely monitored sensors placed in or on the ground—or, in some cases, in trees—to detect, track, identify, and differentiate humans, animals, and vehicles. Sensors have various detection capabilities, including seismic, magnetic, and passive infrared capabilities. Along the northern border, about 60 percent of unattended ground sensors have imaging capabilities and send photographs or videos to agents and to the communications centers.

<sup>19</sup>According to Border Patrol officials, these towers are 33 feet tall, can withstand cold weather, and are a variant of towers deployed along the southwest border. Because Autonomous Surveillance Towers send alerts to agents, they do not need to be continuously monitored.

<sup>20</sup>When a CBP agent seizes one or multiple drugs from one or multiple offenders, the entire incident is referred to as a drug seizure event. Within a drug seizure event, there may be one or multiple drug seizures. In our analysis, we defined a “drug seizure” as each individual drug type seized within a drug seizure event. [GAO-26-107501](#).

<sup>21</sup>Border Patrol may be the lead agency in a drug seizure or may assist another federal, state, or local agency. These figures include seizures that Border Patrol led or provided assistance to.

**Table 2: U.S. Border Patrol Drug Seizure Events Along the Northern Border, Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Through Quarter 2 of FY 2025**

Sector	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025 (Quarters 1 and 2) <sup>a</sup>
Blaine	27	16	18	36	31	69	56
Buffalo	88	95	45	79	92	170	57
Detroit	316	427	426	384	572	522	274
Grand Forks	51	70	67	22	11	10	24
Havre	50	17	13	15	20	43	15
Houlton	132	158	81	50	66	41	30
Spokane	129	103	86	40	64	118	90
Swanton	165	169	87	41	40	39	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>958</b>	<b>1,055</b>	<b>823</b>	<b>667</b>	<b>896</b>	<b>1,012</b>	<b>566</b>

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Border Patrol drug seizure data. | GAO-26-109195

Notes: This table reports drug seizures events in which Border Patrol participated. A drug seizure event represents one or multiple drug seizures. In our analysis, we define a “drug seizure” as each individual drug type seized within a drug seizure event.

<sup>a</sup>Fiscal year 2025 drug seizure events reported for October 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025.

We also found that the change in the number of Border Patrol drug seizure events varied based on the area. For example, Blaine sector had 27 drug seizure events reported in fiscal year 2019, compared to 69 reported events in fiscal year 2024. On the other hand, Swanton sector had 165 events reported in fiscal year 2019, compared to 39 reported events in fiscal year 2024. The decline in drug seizures between ports of entry at the northern border in certain sectors does not necessarily reflect a decline in drug trafficking activity, according to Border Patrol officials. For example, Border Patrol officials in the Swanton sector stated that they have not been able to target as many drug shipments due to increasingly spending their time processing migrant encounters.

**Firearms and currency seizures.** We found that Border Patrol also seized a higher number of firearms in fiscal year 2024 compared to fiscal year 2019.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, our data analysis showed that Border Patrol participated in the seizure of 141 firearms in fiscal year 2019 and 839 firearms in fiscal year 2024.<sup>23</sup> Border Patrol was involved in the seizure of 451 firearms in the first two quarters of fiscal year 2025. Most of these

<sup>22</sup>GAO-26-107501.

<sup>23</sup>Records of Border Patrol seizures include firearm-related equipment, such as silencers and parts.

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seizures took place in the Detroit and Spokane sectors during this time, and firearms are generally smuggled from the U.S. into Canada, according to CBP officials.

In addition, we found that Border Patrol's Blaine sector substantially increased the seizure of currency in fiscal year 2024, whereas currency seizures were largely unchanged in other northern border sectors.<sup>24</sup> Specifically, in fiscal years 2019 through 2023, Blaine sector reported 14 U.S. currency seizures events combined and 118 U.S. currency seizures events in fiscal year 2024. As of March 31, 2025, Blaine sector reported 51 U.S. currency seizures events for fiscal year 2025, compared to the other northern border sectors that reported between zero and five cash seizures events each. Blaine sector seized between \$5 and \$10,415, with a median of \$1,000, for each currency seizure event in fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

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## Number of CBP Agents Decreased from Fiscal Year 2019 Through Fiscal Year 2024, and Border Patrol Has Not Fully Addressed a Key Staffing Gap

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### Number of Border Patrol and AMO Agents Along the Northern Border Decreased from Fiscal Year 2019 Through Fiscal Year 2024

We found that the number of Border Patrol agents authorized in northern border sectors increased by about 9 percent from fiscal year 2019 to fiscal year 2024, while the number of agents on board in these sectors

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<sup>24</sup>When a Border Patrol agent seizes one or multiple currencies from one or multiple offenders, the entire incident is referred to as a currency seizure event.

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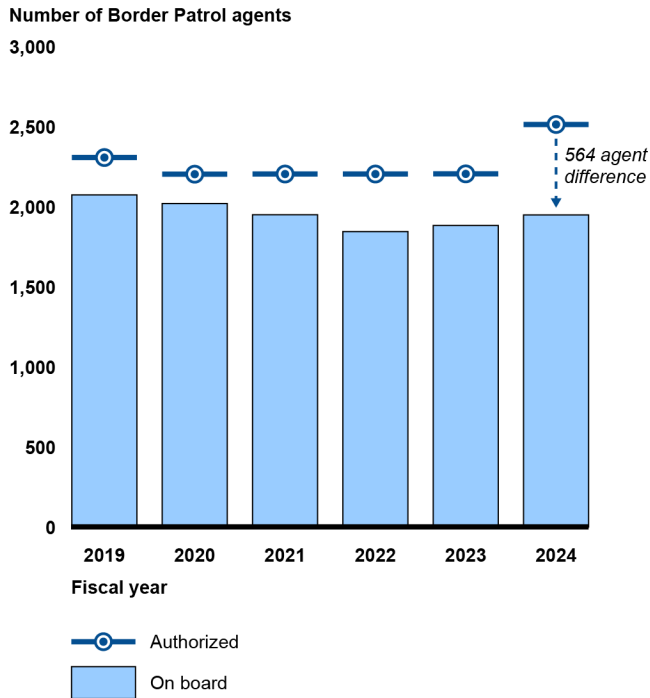
decreased.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, at the end of fiscal year 2019, Border Patrol reported that 2,306 agents were authorized to be stationed in sectors along the northern border. At the end of fiscal year 2024, Border Patrol reported that 2,512 agents were authorized.

Despite the number of agents authorized in sectors along the northern border increasing, the actual number of Border Patrol agents assigned to and working in these sectors decreased by about 6 percent during this period. In particular, the total number of Border Patrol agents assigned to these sectors decreased from 2,073 at the end of fiscal year 2019 to 1,948 at the end of fiscal year 2024. The Border Patrol agent staffing level across northern border sectors—which measures the actual number of Border Patrol agents as a percent of authorized staffing levels—decreased from 90 percent at the end of fiscal year 2019 to 78 percent at the end of fiscal year 2024. Overall, the staffing level along the northern border was 78 percent at the end of fiscal year 2024. In comparison, the staffing level along the southwest border at the end of fiscal year 2024 was 90 percent. The levels of authorized agents and on board agents assigned to sectors on the northern border are shown in figure 2.

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<sup>25</sup>Authorized staff for Border Patrol agent positions represent the authorized staffing levels or number of such positions determined by Border Patrol to be supported by its appropriation and informed by legislative language contained in explanatory statements and other congressional documents.

**Figure 2: Number of Authorized and On Board U.S. Border Patrol Agents Assigned to Sectors on the Northern Border, Fiscal Year 2019 Through Fiscal Year 2024**



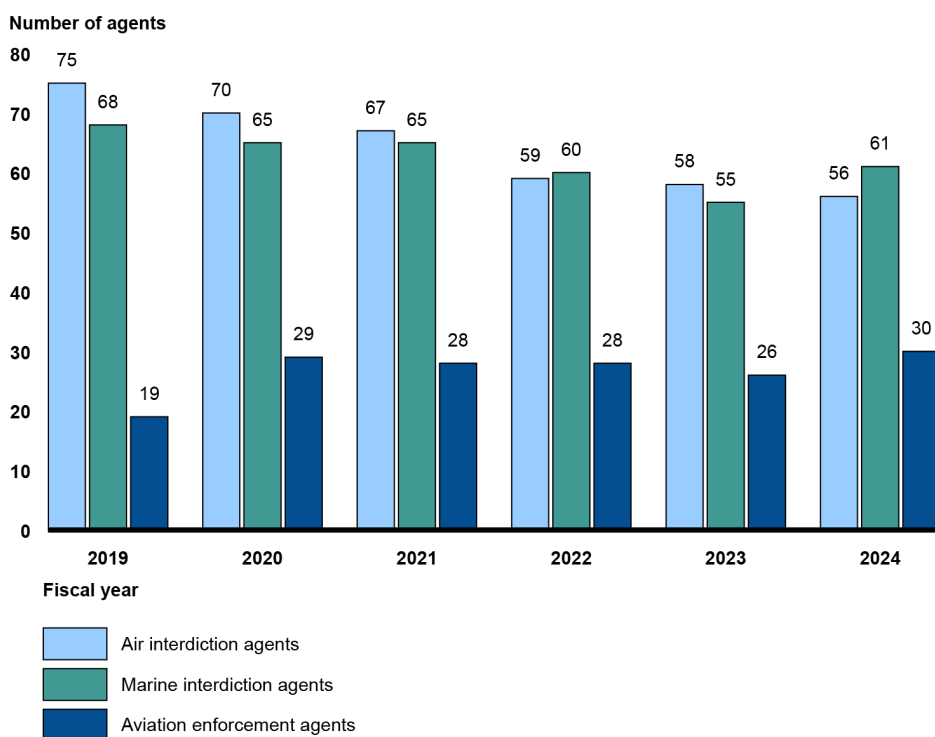
Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Border Patrol data. | GAO-26-109195

According to Border Patrol officials, the staffing rate was low, in part, due to limited funding levels at the time for Border Patrol agent transfers between sectors. In addition, officials stated that some agents had declined relocation offers because of high housing prices along the northern border. In March 2025, Border Patrol restarted efforts to place new agents in northern border stations. We reported that Border Patrol reasoned that it could increase staffing levels along the northern border without relying on transfers from other sectors.

Regarding AMO, we found that the number of AMO agents on board at branches and units near the northern border decreased from 162 at the end of fiscal year 2019 to 147 at the end of fiscal year 2024—a decrease

of about 9 percent.<sup>26</sup> These changes are shown in figure 3. Despite the decreased number of AMO agents along the northern border, AMO flight and float hours increased from fiscal year 2019 through fiscal year 2024, as previously discussed.

**Figure 3: Number of Air and Marine Operations Agents On Board at Branches and Units Along the Northern Border, Fiscal Year 2019 Through Fiscal Year 2024**



GAO analysis of Air and Marine Operations information. | GAO-26-109195

However, CBP expects that an upcoming retirement surge could have significant effects on CBP's ability to meet its mission. As we reported in September 2024, CBP expects significant increases in retirement rates due to a hiring surge for Border Patrol agents that took place from 2007

<sup>26</sup>These data include National Air Security Operations-Grand Forks, which is not part of AMO's Northern Region but operates along the northern border. These data exclude Manassas Air Branch, Chicago Air Unit, and New York Air Unit. Although they are subordinate to AMO's Northern Region, they do not generally operate along the northern border. Unlike Border Patrol, AMO currently does not set an authorized number of agents per branch or unit.

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through 2009. Agents hired during this period will be eligible to retire beginning in 2027.<sup>27</sup>

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## Border Patrol Has Not Fully Addressed Staffing Gaps for Key Support Position

We have previously reported that CBP has taken action to help strengthen its recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts for Border Patrol agents.<sup>28</sup> For example, in fiscal year 2024, CBP offered recruitment incentives of \$20,000 per recipient, with an additional \$10,000 for recipients stationed in remote locations. CBP also has increased its use of financial incentives to retain law enforcement personnel, including for Border Patrol agents. In July 2025, CBP received over \$2 billion, available until September 30, 2029, to provide recruitment bonuses, performance awards, or annual retention bonuses to eligible CBP officers and agents.<sup>29</sup>

However, in February 2026, we found that Border Patrol had not filled or retained staff for all authorized Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialist positions across northern border sectors, something that we also raised in 2019.<sup>30</sup> These are professional, nonuniformed staff members who support Border Patrol's sector intelligence units and have a range of responsibilities, including monitoring land-based surveillance technology (such as the feeds from camera towers and unattended ground sensors).

At the end of fiscal year 2024, Border Patrol authorized 115 supervisory and nonsupervisory Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialist positions, and 88 of these positions were filled, a staffing rate of 77 percent. Staffing rates ranged from 57 percent in Swanton sector to 92 percent in Spokane sector. For fiscal years 2019 through 2024, the staffing rate varied between 76 percent and 84 percent across all sectors.<sup>31</sup> With the exception of one year (fiscal year 2022), these staffing rates were lower than in fiscal year 2018, the year in which the Law

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<sup>27</sup>See GAO, *U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Efforts to Improve Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention of Law Enforcement Personnel*, [GAO-24-107029](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 25, 2024).

<sup>28</sup>[GAO-24-107029](#).

<sup>29</sup>See An Act to provide for reconciliation pursuant to title II of H. Con. Res 14, Pub. L. No. 119-21, § 90002(a)(2), 139 Stat. 72 at 358.

<sup>30</sup>[GAO-19-470](#) and [GAO-26-107501](#).

<sup>31</sup>These figures combine the Law Enforcement Communications Assistant position and the Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialist position. Border Patrol employed Law Enforcement Communications Assistants until fiscal year 2020.

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Enforcement Information Systems Specialist position was created. Where such staffing gaps exist, they can reduce a sector's ability to fully monitor surveillance camera and sensor feeds.

The senior Border Patrol official in charge of workforce planning told us that Border Patrol did not have plans to improve the recruitment or retention of Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialists. This official stated that Border Patrol expects them to leave the agency and look for better career opportunities.<sup>32</sup>

We recommended in February 2026 that CBP develop and implement a plan with strategies for addressing workforce gaps in the Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialist position. Such a plan would help ensure Border Patrol has sufficient personnel with the appropriate skills to effectively use the surveillance technology currently deployed along the northern border. DHS agreed with our recommendation and described steps CBP is taking to hire additional Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialists. In addition, DHS noted that Border Patrol plans to analyze the feasibility of offering a retention incentive to reduce attrition in this position. DHS estimates that CBP will complete these efforts by January 2027. We will continue to monitor Border Patrol's actions in response to this recommendation.

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<sup>32</sup>According to Border Patrol headquarters officials, factors that affect Border Patrol's ability to hire include a lengthy background investigation process, during which applicants may find other employment; limited local applicant pools; high cost of living; and minimal career advancement opportunities. Officials from three sectors told us that Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialists leave the Border Patrol due to the low pay of the position compared to what they can earn at other local or federal agencies. Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialists are hired at the GS-5 or the GS-7 level with promotion potential up to GS-9. Supervisory Law Enforcement Information Systems Specialists are at the GS-11 level. [GAO-26-107501](#).

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## CBP Has Not Developed Performance Measures to Assess Its Effectiveness at Securing the Northern Border between Ports of Entry

We reported in 2019 that CBP had performance measures (strategic and management) that assessed certain border security operations or programs, some of which include data from the northern border.<sup>33</sup> But we found that Border Patrol and AMO did not have specific measures to assess their effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry.

Regarding Border Patrol, we found that its two strategic and four management measures included some data from the northern border but did not assess Border Patrol's effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. The strategic measures assessed Border Patrol's use of reports developed using geospatial intelligence technology of potential illicit cross-border activity.<sup>34</sup> However, this technology was not applied in maritime environments, so the measures did not include data from two northern border sectors that have maritime-only borders. Of Border Patrol's four management measures, three included data from the northern border combined with other areas such as the southwest border.<sup>35</sup>

Regarding AMO, we found that its one strategic and one management measures included data from the northern border but did not assess AMO's effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry in the air and maritime environments. For the strategic measure, AMO reported the percentage of detected conventional aircraft incursions resolved.<sup>36</sup> For the management measure, AMO reported its air mission launch rate, which is the percentage of all requests made for aircraft to

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<sup>33</sup>[GAO-19-470](#). Performance measures include strategic and management measures and their associated targets or goals identified by DHS and CBP. Strategic measures communicate results delivered for agency goals by mission programs and are reported in the DHS Annual Performance Report. Management measures highlight mission program performance expectations related to budgetary plans and are reported in CBP's annual congressional budget justification. See generally Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-352, 124 Stat. 3866 (2011) (updating the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993).

<sup>34</sup>The two strategic measures—the percent of recurring border surveillance implemented in remote, low-risk areas between ports of entry and the percent of time Border Patrol meets its goal of responding to potential illegal activity in remote, low-risk areas—were based on information from CBP's National Border Geospatial Intelligence Strategy.

<sup>35</sup>See [GAO-19-470](#) for more information about Border Patrol's four management measures at the time of our review.

<sup>36</sup>The measure represents the percent of conventional aircraft detected visually or by sensor technology, suspected of illicit cross-border activity, which are brought to a successful resolution by its Air and Marine Operations Center.

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which AMO was able to respond. These two measures included data across all border areas, including the northern border, but were not specific to the northern border.

We recommended that Border Patrol and AMO develop and implement performance measures to assess their effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. Such measures could help CBP assess the effectiveness of its northern border operations, including challenges due to limited staffing and resources, and take corrective actions, as necessary.

DHS agreed with both recommendations, and Border Patrol and AMO have taken some steps to address them. Regarding Border Patrol, in August 2024, officials told us that the Chief of the U.S. Border Patrol directed all sectors to develop operational objectives and tasks that will serve as a framework for the development of new performance measures. In April 2026, officials stated and agency documentation indicates that this effort for the northern border—referred to as the Northern Border Index—is ongoing, and they anticipate Border Patrol will implement new performance measures beginning in fiscal year 2027.

In May 2024, AMO provided us with a northern region strategic plan that contained strategic goals and associated objectives, as well as short-term goals and accomplishments for fiscal year 2024. In January 2025, AMO officials told us they were working on an implementation plan and standard operating procedures related to northern border measures. As of June 2026, we are coordinating with AMO to obtain additional information on its strategic goals, associated objectives, and performance measures beyond fiscal year 2024.

We will continue to monitor Border Patrol's and AMO's efforts to address these recommendations.

In conclusion, the northern border spans almost 4,000 miles across 12 states and comprises widely different types of terrain—a fact that challenges border security efforts. CBP continues to focus its border security operations along the northern border on key threat areas while also monitoring and addressing other threats such as vehicle and drone incursions. CBP received billions of dollars in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act and the Secure America Act to hire and train additional CBP agents and officers, and around \$2 billion in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act for recruitment and retention bonuses, among other things. We have reported that CBP has faced challenges meeting its staffing targets for

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the northern border. We have made recommendations related to staffing as well as performance management that would help to address some of these challenges. Addressing our recommendations would help CBP assess the effectiveness of its northern border operations and help ensure that Border Patrol has sufficient personnel with the appropriate skills to effectively use surveillance technology.

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Chairmen Guest and Pfluger, Ranking Members Correa and Magaziner, and Members of the Subcommittees, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

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## GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

If you or your staff have any questions about this testimony, please contact me at [MacLeodH@gao.gov](mailto:MacLeodH@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this statement. GAO staff who made key contributions to this statement are Kathryn Bernet (Assistant Director), Christopher Ferencik (Assistant Director), Eric Warren (Analyst in Charge), Michele Fejfar, Sasan J. "Jon" Najmi, and Natalie Swabb. Other staff who made key contributions to the reports cited in the testimony are identified in the source products.

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