Congressional Budget Office
Cost Estimate

October 22, 2026

At a Glance

S. 3897, Officer John Barnes and Chief Michael Ansbro Public Safety Officers' Benefit Program Expansion Act of 2026

As passed by the Senate on August 7, 2026

By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2027	2027-2031	2027-2036
Direct Spending (Outlays)	2	4	7
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	2	4	7
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	2	11	not estimated

Increases *net direct spending* in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2037?	< $2.5 billion	Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?	Yes
Increases *on-budget deficits* in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2037?	< $5 billion	**Mandate Effects**	
		Contains intergovernmental mandate?	No
		Contains private-sector mandate?	No

The act would

- Establish deadlines for the Department of Justice (DOJ) to review and pay claims for death and disability benefits under the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program and require interim payments when the agency does not meet those deadlines
- Require DOJ to conduct additional outreach to public safety agencies and claimants, issue subpoenas when agencies fail to provide necessary records, and implement recommendations made by the Government Accountability Office to improve administration of the program

Estimated budgetary effects would mainly stem from

- Providing death and disability payments for claims that would not otherwise be submitted for benefits under current law
- Accelerating payments because of faster processing of claims
- Processing claims, conducting outreach, and implementing new reporting and auditing requirements

Areas of significant uncertainty include

- Projecting the number of claims to be filed and the timing of benefit payments
- Calculating the cost of improvements in efficiency of claims processing

Detailed estimate begins on the next page.

See also
CBO's Cost Estimates Explained, *CBO Describes Its Cost-Estimating Process*, *Glossary*

Summary of the Legislation

S. 3897 would require the Department of Justice (DOJ) to make several administrative changes to the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program. That program provides death, disability, and education assistance benefits to eligible public safety officers and their survivors. The legislation would establish statutory deadlines to notify claimants and public agencies of information missing from submitted claims, require DOJ to make final eligibility determinations within 270 days of receiving information necessary to process a claim, and require the department to subpoena records from public agencies that fail to provide information within specified periods. S. 3897 also would require DOJ to make interim payments that would not be subject to recoupment when certain deadlines are not met, undertake outreach to claimants and public agencies, and approve certain death benefit claims certified by the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund (VCF) and the World Trade Center Health Program (WTCHP). Finally, the act would direct the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to audit certain pending claims and DOJ to implement any recommendations to improve the program.

Estimated Federal Cost

The estimated budgetary effects of S. 3897 are shown in Table 1. The costs of the legislation fall within budget function 750 (administration of justice).

Table 1.
Estimated Budgetary Effects of S. 3897

	By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars											
	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2027-2031	2027-2036
Increases in Direct Spending												
Estimated Budget Authority	2	1	*	1	*	1	*	1	*	1	4	7
Estimated Outlays	2	1	*	1	*	1	*	1	*	1	4	7
Increases in Spending Subject to Appropriation												
Estimated Authorization	2	2	2	2	3	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	11	n.e.
Estimated Outlays	2	2	2	2	3	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	11	n.e.

n.e. = not estimated; * = between zero and $500,000.

Basis of Estimate

For this estimate, CBO assumes that the legislation will be enacted near the end of calendar year 2026. This estimate is based mainly on CBO's analyses of historical claims-processing activity and information supplied by DOJ.

Background
In the event of a death or permanent and total disability resulting from physical injuries in the line of duty, the PSOB Program provides a onetime cash benefit to federal, state, and local officers in law enforcement, firefighting, emergency medical services, and emergency management. The program also provides death and education benefits to survivors. Benefit amounts are adjusted annually to account for inflation.

In 2026, $461,656 was the amount paid for both the death benefit and the disability benefit. Death benefits are classified in the budget as direct spending, and disability benefits are classified as discretionary spending.

Administrative Requirements
S. 3897 would impose new requirements, including processing deadlines, on the PSOB Program at several stages in the claims process. Notably, the act would direct DOJ to issue a final eligibility determination within 270 days of receiving all required information for a claim. CBO expects that implementing those requirements would increase the workload of claims examiners, attorneys, supervisors, and payment staff. DOJ would need to modify its claims management system to track statutory deadlines, generate notices and alerts, identify claims requiring interim payments, and record whether delays are attributable to claimants' or public agencies' failure to provide information.

S. 3897 would require DOJ to subpoena records from public agencies that have not provided information needed to process claims. The department already can issue subpoenas but currently exercises that authority in only a few cases each year. The act also would direct DOJ to expand outreach to public agencies, disabled public safety officers, families of affected officers, and national public safety organizations. DOJ would be required to assist GAO with audits of claims pending for more than a year and implement recommendations from GAO for improving the PSOB Program.

Direct Spending
CBO estimates that enacting S. 3897 would increase direct spending by $7 million over the 2027-2036 period. Over the 2016-2025 period, DOJ paid 385 death benefit claims, on average, in each year.

Program Applications. CBO expects that under the legislation, faster processing and increased outreach would result in some new applications that would not be submitted to the PSOB Program under current law.

Using information from GAO and based on an analysis of annual applications over the past decade, CBO estimates that roughly 10 new applications (or 1 application per year) would be approved and thus increase direct spending by $5 million over the 2027-2036 period.

Application Processing. CBO expects that the new deadlines for DOJ's claims processing under S. 3897 would primarily affect the timing of payments for some claims and would not have much effect on the number of claims ultimately approved.

According to claims status reports from DOJ, over the past five years, 100 to 200 claims at any given time were pending for more than 270 days. For roughly 40 percent of those applications there is no documented basis, such as the need for additional information from a claimant or an employer, for the delay. Using information from DOJ, CBO estimates that, under S. 3897, four additional claims would be paid each year, and those payments would be made about three months earlier than would be the case under current law.

On that basis, CBO estimates that under the legislation about $2 million in death benefits would be paid one year earlier than under current law. The net effect of those earlier payments would be an increase in direct spending in 2027; in the rest of the years from 2028-2036 the effects would essentially net to zero. Starting in fiscal year 2028, the estimated $2 million in payments shifted into 2027 would be offset by $2 million in payments shifted from 2029 into 2028—an effect that would continue throughout the period. (Because fiscal year 2026 ended on September 30, no offsetting shift of fiscal year 2027 payments into fiscal year 2026 would occur.)

Other Changes. The act would require DOJ to make interim payments to claimants for certain claims not decided within 270 days that would not be subject to repayment if the claims were eventually denied and to approve certain death claims certified by the VCF or the WTCHP unless there is clear and convincing evidence of ineligibility. CBO expects that most claims affected by those provisions would be approved under current law. Therefore, we estimate that enacting those provisions would increase direct spending by less than $500,000 over the 2027-2036 period.

Spending Subject to Appropriation
CBO estimates that implementing S. 3897 would cost $11 million over the 2027-2031 period. Any related spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

Department of Justice. CBO expects that implementing the legislation would require the work of five DOJ employees, at an average annual compensation cost of $220,000 in 2027. We also anticipate that the department would enter into contracts for technology, legal assistance, and customer service. On that basis, and accounting for anticipated inflation, CBO estimates that DOJ's costs to implement the S. 3897 would total $10 million over the 2027-2031 period.

Government Accountability Office. The legislation would require an annual GAO audit of any PSOB Program claim pending for more than a year. For each one, GAO would identify the stage of review, reasons for the delay, use of subpoena authority, frequency of contact with claimants, implementation of claims-processing procedures, and effectiveness of

outreach and claims assistance. Using information about the cost of similar requirements, CBO estimates that GAO's costs would total $1 million over the 2027-2031 period.

Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program. The PSOB Program pays disability benefits to public safety officers and provides educational assistance to eligible survivors to defray the cost of tuition, room and board, books, and supplies. CBO estimates that, in total, implementing S. 3897 would increase the PSOB Program's disability and education benefit payments by less than $500,000 over the 2027-2031 period.

That estimate is based on applying the same assumptions for disability benefits and educational assistance that were used to estimate death benefit claims to the annual average of 45 disability benefit claims that DOJ paid over the past decade (or roughly 10 percent of the death claims the department pays each year).

Uncertainty

CBO's estimate for S. 3897 is subject to considerable uncertainty concerning the extent to which administrative requirements would shorten the time for claims processing and payment and increase applications. The 270-day deadline to complete the eligibility review would not commence until DOJ received all required information; incomplete information from claimants and public agencies accounts for a significant portion of current delays. Under S. 3897, DOJ could satisfy the 270-day determination requirement by issuing interim payments before completing final determinations.

Costs could be higher than CBO estimates if the new deadlines cause DOJ to complete a larger number of claims earlier, if mandatory subpoenas substantially accelerate the receipt of agency records, or if the faster claims process and expanded outreach results in a larger number of additional applications filed than CBO estimates.

Administrative costs also could be higher if DOJ requires more claims examiners, attorneys, and other staff than CBO anticipates. Alternatively, costs could be lower than estimated if DOJ can satisfy most requirements by modifying existing systems and reassigning current staff or if the required changes do not result in additional applicants or an acceleration of the review process.

Thus, both the amount and timing of benefit payments and the administrative costs of implementing the legislation could be different than estimated.

Pay-As-You-Go Considerations

The Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010 establishes budget-reporting and enforcement procedures for legislation affecting direct spending or revenues. The net changes in outlays that are subject to those pay-as-you-go procedures are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
CBO's Estimate of the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Effects of S. 3897, the Officer John Barnes and Chief Michael Ansbro Public Safety Officers' Benefit Program Expansion Act of 2026, as Passed by the Senate on August 7, 2026

	By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars											
	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2027-2031	2027-2036
	Net Increase in the Deficit											
Pay-As-You-Go Effect	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	4	7

* = between zero and $500,000.

Increase in Long-Term Net Direct Spending and Deficits

CBO estimates that enacting S. 3897 would not increase net direct spending by more than $2.5 billion in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2037.

CBO estimates that enacting S. 3897 would not increase on-budget deficits by more than $5 billion in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2037.

Mandates

S. 3897 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act.

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