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## Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) Reform

**Call to Action** Congress is urged to pass legislation mandating the **modernization of the ASVAB no later than January 1, 2027**, to ensure the test reflects current educational norms and meets the evolving needs of the military. A reformed ASVAB will enhance recruitment and readiness in our Armed Forces.

**Issue Overview** The ASVAB, a critical assessment used to determine military enlistment eligibility and job placement, **has not been updated in more than 20 years**. It remains out of step with the new mission sets, such as cyber and space, and current educational practices, such as the widespread use of calculators for standardized testing and classroom learning.

### **Key Concerns**

- **Inaccurate Reflection of Skills:** The test does not reflect the skills necessary for today's military jobs, which increasingly require technical and analytical proficiencies.
- **Outdated Format:** The ASVAB does not permit calculators, creating a disconnect with current educational norms.
- **Missed Recruitment Opportunities:** A test that better aligns with current practices could improve the recruitment of highly qualified candidates and reduce unnecessary barriers to enlistment.

### **Proposed Actions**

- **Commission a Study:** Direct the Department of Defense to conduct a comprehensive review of the ASVAB's format, content, and administration, focusing on updating it to meet 21st-century standards.
- **Revise the Test:** Revise the test to assess aptitude for new skills necessary for today's military and update test to improve accuracy in evaluating mathematical and technical skills.
- **Timeline for Implementation:** Direct the Department of Defense to update ASVAB to be implemented no later than **January 1, 2027**, to ensure timely modernization and integration.

### **Recommended Bill Language**

- **Study Mandate:**  
*"The Secretary of Defense shall commission a study, no later than 180 days after the enactment of this Act, to evaluate and propose updates to the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). This study shall include consultation with educational experts, military personnel, and technical specialists to ensure alignment with current military needs and educational standards. The results of this study will be provided to the Defense Committees of Oversight no later than 365 days after the enactment of this Act."*
- **Implementation Deadline:**  
*"The Secretary of Defense shall implement the updated ASVAB no later than January 1, 2027."*

### **Benefits of Reform**

- **Enhanced Readiness:** A modernized test ensures recruits possess the relevant skills necessary for today's advanced military operations and mission sets.
- **Improved Accessibility:** Aligning the ASVAB with modern educational practices makes the test more accessible to potential recruits.

## Background

- References.
  - Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), <https://www.officialasvab.com/>
  - Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 1145.01, Qualitative Distribution of Military Manpower incorporating Change 3, effective 19SEP24
  - Sturm, H. M., *The Validity of the SAT and ACT*, dated 2022 (<https://spark.bethel.edu/etd/862>)
- The ASVAB is a timed test, conducted generally as either a proctored test coordinated through the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) or through the Computer Administrated version (CAT-ASVAB [implemented in 1996]), which is used to determine eligibility for military careers. The ASVAB measures aptitude in four domains: verbal, math, science and technical, and spatial.
- The subtests within the ASVAB are General Science, Arithmetic Reasoning, Word Knowledge, Paragraph Comprehension, Mathematics, Electronics, Auto and Shop, Mechanical, and Assembling Objects. Scores in each area of these subtests are commonly referred to as line scores, which determine eligibility in specific Military Occupational Specialties (MOS). Scores on four of the subtests (Word Knowledge, Paragraph Comprehension, Arithmetic Reasoning, and Mathematics Knowledge) are combined to compute the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score, used for eligibility for the armed forces. An AFQT score of 31 out of 100 is required for entry to military service, unless authorized for enlistment as Mental Category IV (MCAT IV), requiring an AFQT of 16 however this is congressionally capped at a total of 4% of enlistments.
- Rather than an AFQT score, the use of subset or line scores that are directly related to aptitude areas required to perform technical MOSs (ex cyber) would better support identifying technical aptitude for these type of MOSs.
- Historically, applicants who have enlisted under the MCAT IV program have been shown to have better training pipeline success and increased longevity within the military.
- The ASVAB varies in time limit based on the method of administration, however, generally requires 3 to 4 hours to complete. Use of calculators is not allowed.
- The ASVAB underwent its most recent revision in 2002, with a subsequent percentile rank scoring system renormalization in 2004.
- In FY23, MN Army National Guard (MNARNG) Recruiting and Retention Battalion incurred 293 applicants disqualified for entrance to the MNARNG due to failing ASVAB results out of 1,865 processors (15.7%) at the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS). In FY24, 195 applicants were disqualified based on low ASVAB scores of a total of 2,130 processors (9.2%).
- In addition to disqualification for service, an intangible number of individuals were not qualified for their primary Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) preference based on individual line score results.
- Since the last revision of the ASVAB, the Scholastic Aptitude Test underwent two major revisions (2005 and 2016) and the American College Test (ACT) was adjusted once (2005) (Strum 2022) and there is another revision to the ACT scheduled for implementation in Spring 2025.
- Children are introduced to calculators as early as grade three and their use is permitted throughout their education. By prohibiting calculator use on the ASVAB, the DoD limits many potential recruits who have a firm understanding of the subject matter but are unaccustomed performing long-handed math.
- Previously, the House Armed Services Committee included provisions aimed at enhancing the ASVAB's effectiveness and accessibility. Additionally, the House proposed initiatives to integrate the ASVAB more closely with civilian career planning resources. Draft language not found.