

FEWER YOUNG MEN ARE REGISTERING FOR DRAFT, OFFICIALS SAY AN EFFORT TO CHANGE THAT IS UNDERWAY, INVOLVING NOT ONLY THE SELECTIVE SERVICE, BUT ALSO EDUCATION AND INS.

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Body

Nearly one in five young American men are failing to register for the military draft as required by law, risking fines and jail as well as ineligibility for a wide array of benefits including student loans and government jobs, the Selective Service Administration said yesterday.

Agency officials said ignorance rather than willful resistance appeared to be behind the compliance numbers, which were at 93 percent a decade ago. "Since 1990 we have seen an erosion of about 1 percent a year," agency spokesman Lewis Brodsky said.

"Our research has consistently shown that the biggest barrier to young men's compliance is a simple lack of awareness," Selective Service Director Gil Coronado said. "It's tragic to see young men potentially missing out on future opportunities because they just do not know they are required to register."

"The consequences of not registering, for whatever reasons, are enormous," said Education Secretary Richard W. Riley, who joined Coronado at a news conference in which they announced the formation of partnerships with educational associations to get the word out to young men.

For men born in 1980 who are now 19 and 20 years old, the compliance rate is about 83 percent, Brodsky said.

A state-by-state survey issued by the agency showed some large states had low registration levels among those men - California with 79 percent and Texas, 77 percent. New Hampshire, by contrast, ranked highest, with 95 percent.

Pennsylvania's compliance rate was 82 percent, New Jersey, 86, and Delaware, 83.

The law requires all young men living inside the United States and its territories to register with the Selective Service within 30 days of their 18th birthday. That includes immigrants and noncitizen residents of the United States.

The names are gathered in case a national emergency requires a military draft.

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Selective Service officials and members of Congress at the news conference called the system an important national "insurance policy." They said the all-volunteer enlistment policy of the armed services was working as intended in peacetime. The last actual **draft** was in 1973 near the end of the Vietnam era.

Failure to **register** can cost **young men** their chance at student loans and grants, job training, government jobs, and citizenship for male immigrants.

It is also a felony punishable by up to five years in jail or prison and a fine of up to \$250,000, but such cases are rarely prosecuted. The last prosecution was in 1985, agency officials said.

"To make sure that any **draft** is as fair and as equitable as possible, we've got to make sure we reach everyone," Brodsky said. "And it's difficult to know who you're not reaching."

"But we suspect, based on the demographics we've seen, that it's high school dropouts and immigrants" who are not **registering**, Brodsky said.

Brodsky said the agency was working with the Immigration and Naturalization Service as well as schools to try to get more immigrants to **register**.

The Selective Service survey showed that the states with the lowest compliance rates for **men** born in 1980 - all of them under 80 percent - were California, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi and South Carolina, all with a 79 percent rate; Texas; Louisiana, 74 percent; and Hawaii, 73 percent.

The states with the best compliance - all of them 90 percent or better - were New Hampshire; Maine and North Dakota, 93 percent; Iowa and Nebraska, 91 percent; and Minnesota, 90 percent.

Brodsky said there were 13.5 million **men** in the Selective Service database whose ages ranged from 18 to 25. **Men** 26 and older are not eligible for the **draft**. An estimated 1.6 million **men** ages 18 to 25 have not complied with the law, he said.

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