



SOCIAL SECURITY

Office of the Inspector General

August 22, 2011

The Honorable Sam Johnson
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Social Security
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Johnson:

In an April 14, 2011 letter, you requested that we review the Social Security Administration's progress in expanding electronic services to claimants' representatives. Specifically, you asked us to determine the status of the initiatives to (1) allow Internet appeals; (2) provide claimant representatives Internet access to electronic folders; (3) provide notices and other information to claimant representatives through the Internet; and (4) reduce compact disc use for sharing claimant information.

This report highlights our findings pertaining to the issues raised in your letter. To ensure the Agency is aware of the information provided to your office, we are forwarding a copy of this report.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please call me or have your staff contact Misha Kelly, Congressional and Intra-Governmental Liaison, at (202) 358-6319.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr."

Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.
Inspector General

Enclosure

cc:
Michael J. Astrue

CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSE REPORT

*Electronic Services for
Claimant Representatives*

A-05-11-01124



August 2011

Mission

By conducting independent and objective audits, evaluations and investigations, we inspire public confidence in the integrity and security of SSA's programs and operations and protect them against fraud, waste and abuse. We provide timely, useful and reliable information and advice to Administration officials, Congress and the public.

Authority

The Inspector General Act created independent audit and investigative units, called the Office of Inspector General (OIG). The mission of the OIG, as spelled out in the Act, is to:

- Conduct and supervise independent and objective audits and investigations relating to agency programs and operations.
- Promote economy, effectiveness, and efficiency within the agency.
- Prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse in agency programs and operations.
- Review and make recommendations regarding existing and proposed legislation and regulations relating to agency programs and operations.
- Keep the agency head and the Congress fully and currently informed of problems in agency programs and operations.

To ensure objectivity, the IG Act empowers the IG with:

- Independence to determine what reviews to perform.
- Access to all information necessary for the reviews.
- Authority to publish findings and recommendations based on the reviews.

Vision

We strive for continual improvement in SSA's programs, operations and management by proactively seeking new ways to prevent and deter fraud, waste and abuse. We commit to integrity and excellence by supporting an environment that provides a valuable public service while encouraging employee development and retention and fostering diversity and innovation.

Background

OBJECTIVE

The objective of our review was to determine the status of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) efforts to provide electronic services to claimant representatives. Specifically, our review focused on SSA's initiatives to (1) allow Internet appeals; (2) provide claimant representatives Internet access to electronic folders; (3) provide notices and other information to claimant representatives through the Internet; and (4) reduce compact disc (CD) use for sharing claimant information.

BACKGROUND

In an April 14, 2011 letter to the Inspector General, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Social Security, Committee on Ways and Means, requested that we review SSA's progress in expanding electronic services to claimant representatives by determining the status of the initiatives described in our objective.

SSA pays benefits to disabled beneficiaries under the Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs.¹ Claimants file applications with SSA field offices (FO)² and disability determination services (DDS) in each State or responsible jurisdiction to determine whether the claimants are disabled under SSA's eligibility criteria.³ When a claim for disability benefits is denied at the DDS, claimants can appeal and have a hearing before an administrative law judge (ALJ).⁴ Often, claimants hire a third party to represent them during the hearing.

In May 2007, the Commissioner of Social Security testified on the Agency's plans to implement various initiatives to reduce the backlog of disability claims.⁵ One of these initiatives was to expand Internet support for claimant representatives, which included filing appeals over the Internet, sharing electronic disability folders (eFolder)⁶ with claimant representatives, issuing electronic hearing notices, and reducing CD use. At the time, the Commissioner estimated that the changes brought by these initiatives could save up to 45 minutes per case. These savings related to time spent

¹ The *Social Security Act* §§ 221 et seq. and 1611 et seq., 42 U.S.C. §§ 421 et seq. and 1382 et seq.

² 20 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) §§ 404.603 and 416.305.

³ 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.1503 and 416.903.

⁴ 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.929 and 416.929.

⁵ *Funding Social Security's Administrative Costs: Will the Budget Meet the Mission: Hearing Before S. Committee on Finance, 110th Cong. 3-6, (May 23, 2007)* (statement of Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security).

⁶ This is the claimant's file containing all relevant electronic documents associated with his/her appeal.

- printing and mailing documents to claimant representatives;
- creating, encrypting, and mailing CDs with claimant information to claimant representatives; and
- responding to frequent calls from claimant representatives about their cases.

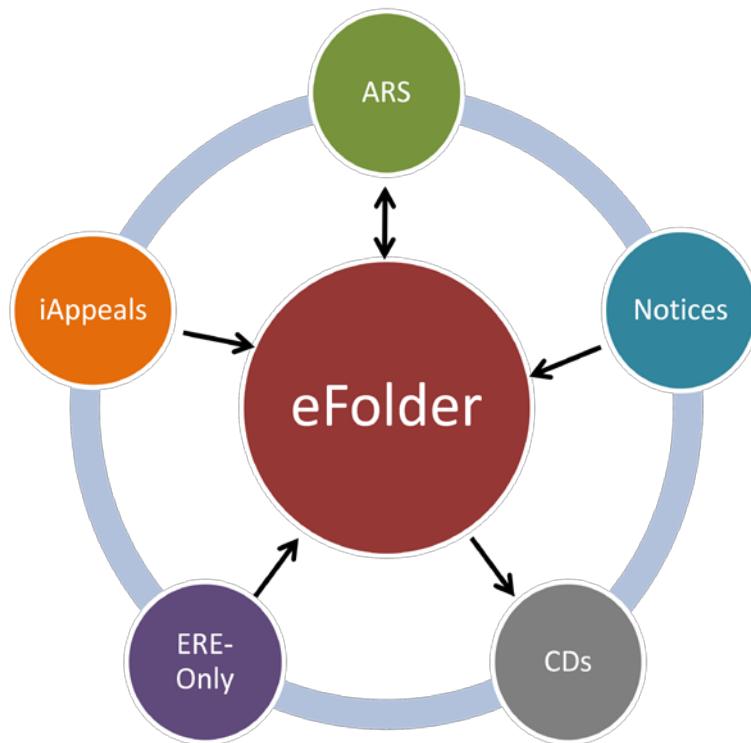
CLAIMANT REPRESENTATIVES

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) processed approximately 738,000 hearings. About 78 percent of these claimants were represented by another party.⁷ According to SSA,⁸ hearing offices and FOs spend a significant amount of time communicating with, and responding to, requests from claimant representatives.

ELECTRONIC INITIATIVES

SSA has established several automation initiatives it believes will improve service to claimant representatives and support streamlining the hearing process (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Electronic Services for Claimant Representatives



⁷ Claimant representatives are attorneys, non-attorneys, and third parties who conduct business on behalf of those filing for disability benefits.

⁸ Fact Sheet – *Informational (Internal) Appointed Representative Services – Electronic Folder Access* (as of June 30, 2011).

- **Internet Appeals (iAppeals):** Allows claimants and claimant representatives to use the Internet to complete and submit a request for a reconsideration or hearing and related disability information.⁹
- **Electronic Records Express (ERE):** Allows medical sources, claimant representatives, and other parties to provide medical records to SSA in an electronic format.¹⁰
- **Appointed Representative Services (ARS):**¹¹ Provides claimant representatives who have registered and been authenticated by SSA with Internet access to their clients' eFolders to view, upload, and download information using an expanded version of ERE. See Appendix B for the contents of the eFolder available for view by claimant representatives.
- **CDs of the eFolder:** Hearing offices and the Appeals Council produce CDs of the eFolder throughout the appeals process for claimants, claimant representatives, experts, ALJs, and other parties. CDs are a one-way process from ODAR to outside parties.
- **Electronic Notices:** SSA places copies of hearing-related notices into the eFolder.¹² ARS provides claimant representatives the ability to view these electronic notices.

⁹ The Internet appeal and disability report process request information, such as medical history, about the adult or child appealing his/her disability decision. The iAppeals information is the same as requested on *Request for Reconsideration* (Form SSA-561-U2), *Request for Hearing by Administrative Law Judge* (SSA Form HA-501-U5), and *Disability Report – Appeal* (Form SSA-3441-BK).

¹⁰ ERE information can be shared using a fax or the Internet. When appropriate, SSA provides users a bar code for submissions to associate the incoming information with the appropriate claimant.

¹¹ ARS was initially called the Appointed Representative Suite of Services.

¹² The representative does not receive any type of alert that notices have been placed in the eFolder.

Results of Review

At the time of our review, SSA was implementing several electronic initiatives while expanding others. These initiatives provided alternatives to claimant representatives while helping streamline hearing-related workloads in field and hearing offices.

- In the first 8 months of FY 2011, claimants filed approximately 52 percent of all requests for hearings using iAppeals. Claimant use of iAppeals has increased over the years, thereby removing workloads from SSA's FOs.
- As of the end of June 2011, SSA enrolled approximately 6,400 claimant representatives in ARS, corresponding to approximately 71 percent of the represented claimants who filed appeals.¹³ ARS will eventually reduce a claimant representative's need for CDs and lessen hearing office and Appeals Council workloads related to producing the CDs.
- SSA maintains electronic copies of hearing-related notices in eFolders, which are available to ARS participants. However, SSA does not notify representatives when it adds a notice. In addition, SSA prints notices centrally, and for at least one type of notice, generates them automatically, thereby reducing the time spent by hearing office staff on such tasks.

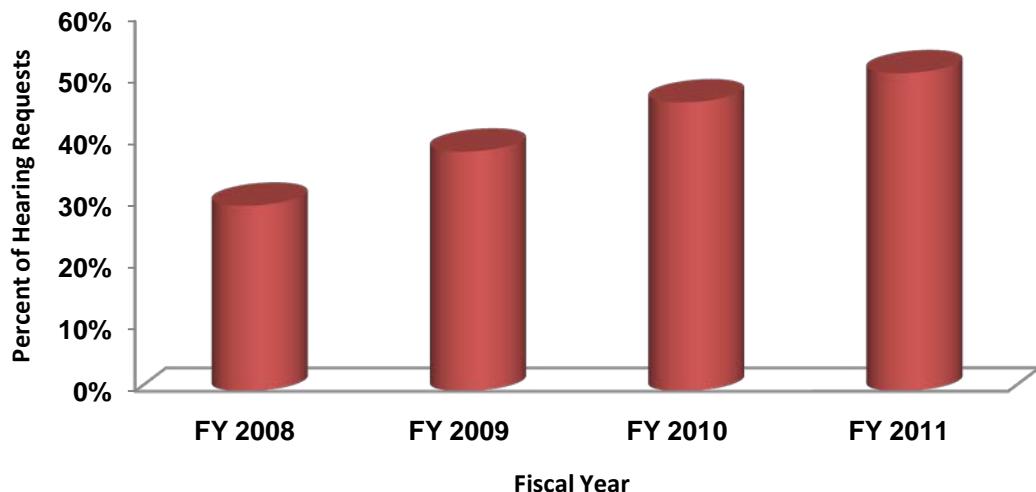
Even with electronic services, claimant representatives still need to be invited and then register in person for eFolder access via ARS. In addition, ARS participants still receive paper notices in the mail. Moreover, implementing ARS will not eliminate ODAR's need to produce encrypted CDs for claimant representatives who do not use ARS as well as for other parties attending hearings. SSA plans to expand eFolder access to additional hearing participants, such as experts, and include additional information in ARS, such as digital recordings of the hearings and reports on the status of pending hearings.

INTERNET APPEALS

In the first 8 months of FY 2011, approximately 294,000 of ODAR's 569,600 hearing receipts (52 percent) were processed through iAppeals. Claimant use of iAppeals has increased over the years (see Figure 2). In FY 2008, when iAppeals was implemented, approximately 30 percent of appeals were filed electronically.

¹³ As we noted earlier, about 78 percent of claimants were represented by another party in FY 2010. If we assume the same rate of representation in FY 2011, and apply the 71 percent rate of represented claimants whose eFolders are part of ARS, then approximately 55 percent of all claimants' eFolders were part of ARS (that is, $0.78 \times 0.71 = 0.55$).

**Figure 2: Trends in Hearing Requests Filed Using iAppeals
(FYs 2008 Through 2011)**



Note: FY 2008 data are for December 2007 through September 2008. FY 2011 data are for October 2010 through May 2011.

Before SSA implemented iAppeals in December 2007, a claimant requested a hearing by submitting the proper paperwork to a FO either in person or by mail.¹⁴ FO personnel then processed and updated this paperwork, and sent the final package to the appropriate hearing office. As part of its move to an electronic disability process, the Agency designed iAppeals as a convenience for claimants as well as to minimize the amount of FO handling of each incoming hearing request. When requests for hearing are filed by paper, FO staff faxes this paperwork into SSA's eFolder.¹⁵

A third party recently conducted a customer satisfaction survey of iAppeals users. Based on the feedback it received, the Agency plans to make improvements to the online application process.¹⁶

APPOINTED REPRESENTATIVE SERVICES

As of the end of June 2011, SSA had enrolled about 6,400 claimant representatives in ARS. ODAR invited 10,569 claimant representatives to enroll in the program between

¹⁴ iAppeals is also used for requests for reconsideration by a DDS.

¹⁵ In some cases, incoming hearing requests with a large number of attachments may be sent to hearing offices to be scanned by higher-capacity equipment, which increases the processing burden at hearing offices.

¹⁶ SSA received the iAppeals customer satisfaction survey results on May 11, 2011. The American Customer Satisfaction Index, LLC, conducted the survey.

November 2010 and the end of June 2011.¹⁷ According to ODAR, enrolled claimant representatives served about 71 percent of the represented claimants with pending hearings. Before ARS, the claimant representatives were provided copies of the eFolder on CDs. Using ARS, claimant representatives can view and download the eFolder's contents as well as add information.¹⁸

ARS was piloted among nine claimant representatives from July 2008 through October 2009 and implemented nationwide on November 1, 2009.¹⁹ However, because of problems with online registration,²⁰ SSA ended the online registration process in February 2010 and modified ARS for in-person registration. While in-person registration occurred throughout 2010,²¹ nationwide implementation of this modified process did not occur until November 2010. After training hearing office staff on registration procedures, ODAR sent invitations to certain claimant representatives²² asking them to visit a hearing office and register for ARS. See Appendix D for the Appointed Representative Service Registration Process.

ARS is limited to individual claimant representatives. Claimants, medical and vocational experts, representative staffs, and ALJs do not have access to ARS at this time. ODAR managers stated the Agency plans to expand access to the experts, while ALJs will be provided access to the eFolder through other means when they are away from the office. In addition, SSA has expanded ARS to include access to cases pending at the Appeals Council level.

¹⁷ ODAR did not formally track the reasons representatives declined enrollment. However, ODAR management informed us that the main reason representatives declined ARS enrollment was that members of their staff could not enroll. Instead, only the appointed representatives were allowed to access the folder through the secured Website. Additionally, some representatives did not enroll because they were uncomfortable using electronic processes.

¹⁸ ARS relies on expanded ERE access to support its implementation. ERE was initially developed for medical providers and others interacting with DDS systems to submit health and school records related to disability claims.

¹⁹ Claimant representatives must complete the *Appointment of Representative* (Form SSA-1696-U4), before SSA grants them access to ARS. Claimant representatives can obtain the Form online or from an SSA office.

²⁰ Claimant representatives requesting access to ARS are required to complete *Registration for Appointed Representative Services and Direct Payment* (Form SSA-1699). Part of the online problems relate to the dual nature of this form, which also requires claimant representatives to request direct fee payment, though not all claimant representatives are seeking this service.

²¹ ODAR continued to register invited claimant representatives for ARS at various conferences.

²² ODAR initially sent invitations to claimant representatives who (1) had requested an invitation, (2) had more than 50 hearing cases pending, (3) were recommended by hearing offices, or (4) had problems with the CD encryption program.

In terms of ARS functionality, SSA plans to add a number of features.²³ For instance, ODAR is considering providing claimant representatives ARS access to the digital recording of the hearing. Additionally, SSA plans to create a hearing office status report in ARS that will provide claimant representatives information on all their pending cases. This status report should be available in January 2012.²⁴

CDs of the eFolder

Hearing offices produce CDs of the eFolder throughout the hearing process for claimants, claimant representatives, experts, ALJs, and other parties. ARS should reduce the need for CDs. However, ODAR continues to create a significant number of CDs as part of the hearing process for claimant representatives who are not part of ARS as well as for other parties. Hearing offices regularly create CDs at various points in the hearing process, and authorized parties can request additional CDs of the eFolder at any point in the process. Hearing office staff create multiple CDs for claimants, claimant representatives who are not part of ARS, ALJs, and experts involved in the hearing process.²⁵ In addition, claimant representatives registered with ARS are still allowed to request CDs.²⁶

SSA estimated it takes hearing office staff an average of 15 minutes to create each encrypted CD containing the eFolder information,²⁷ label and package the CD, and mail the CD and encryption directions to the requesting party.²⁸ For FY 2010, SSA estimated that hearing offices created between 3 to 4 million CDs.

²³ ODAR management informed us that due to limited resources in the Office of Systems, they lack a systems environment mirroring the production environment that would allow them to recreate or test issues with claimant representatives' electronic services in a fully automated, end-to-end manner.

²⁴ An SSA official indicated that the Commissioner is seeking authority to mandate the use of certain electronic services for those claimant representatives seeking the direct payment of fees. SSA is working with the Office of Management and Budget on this proposal, see *Mandatory Use of Electronic Service* (0960-AH31).

²⁵ Experts are asked to return the CDs, unlike the claimant representatives. Returned CDs are shredded. In addition, CDs provided to experts may contain information on more than one claimant, whereas each CD provided to a claimant representative contains information on only one claimant.

²⁶ ODAR staff stated, to ensure all parties have the most updated information, encrypted CDs are still created for claimant representatives on the day of the hearing even if they have access to ARS.

²⁷ ODAR piloted CD encryption in October 2010 and implemented it nationwide in January 2011. The CD encryption software is incompatible with some computer operating systems. As a result, users with software issues are a priority for ARS invitations.

²⁸ According to ODAR staff, to prepare the cost-benefit analysis, each hearing office tracked how long it took to burn the CD. Responses ranged from 10 to 30 minutes, so ODAR used an average of 15 minutes. ODAR staff stated they do not have a time study documenting savings from the hearing office process.

ELECTRONIC AND AUTOMATED NOTICES

Electronic copies of hearing-related notices are maintained in eFolders and available to ARS participants. However, the Agency does not notify the claimant or claimant representative that a notice has been added to the eFolder.²⁹ At the time of this review, SSA was still sending paper notices to all claimant representatives, even if they were registered with ARS. ODAR notices are printed centrally, and for at least one type of notice, automatically generated, thereby reducing the time spent by hearing office staff on such tasks.

Central Print and Mail

SSA's *Central Print and Mail* initiative was designed to reduce the time hearing office staff spends creating, printing, packaging, and mailing notices. According to SSA, its contractor processed approximately 3.9 million hearing-level notices in FY 2010.³⁰ The Agency initiated a pilot of the central service on February 19, 2008. On September 1, 2008, all hearing offices began using the service. ODAR staff stated the majority of hearing notices are now part of this service, with only a few specialized notices still sent by hearing offices. To use the service, hearing offices generate a notice using an existing template, enter the necessary hearing-related information, and save the final document. This information is then transmitted to the contractor for printing and mailing, thereby conserving hearing office resources for other priorities. SSA recently added ALJ decision notices to this process. As a result, SSA anticipates this central service will generate an even greater number of notices in FY 2011 than were processed in FY 2010.

Automated Noticing

The ODAR *Automated Noticing* initiative was designed to streamline the processing of hearing notices by automatically generating a notice based on information in its Case Processing and Management System (CPMS).³¹ Automated noticing software was piloted on March 1, 2010, and implemented on May 2, 2010, as a subset of the *Central Print and Mail* initiative. Since implementation of this initiative, only the *Notice of Hearing Reminder* (SSA Form HA-L503)³² has been fully automated. According to SSA staff, when resources are available, the Agency intends to automate two more forms mailed most often, the *Acknowledgment of Notice of Hearing* and the *Request for Hearing—Acknowledgment Letter*.

²⁹ ODAR obtains a business email address from claimant representatives as part of the ARS registration process. An ODAR manager noted that these email addresses could be used in the future if SSA decides to provide such notification.

³⁰ Of the 3.9 million notices, 2.9 million were *Acknowledgement Notices of Hearing* (Form HA-504), *Notices of Hearing Reminder* (Form HA-L503), or *Request for Hearing—Acknowledgement Letters* (Form HA-L2). We requested a count of all notices sent by ODAR in FY 2010, created both centrally and at hearing offices. However, ODAR staff said they did not have this information.

³¹ Once the automated notice is generated from the software, the vendor prepares the notice for mailing.

³² The notice is automatically generated 14 days before the hearing.

Conclusions

SSA has made progress in its efforts to provide electronic services to claimant representatives. With the availability of iAppeals, claimants and claimant representatives have the option to submit their requests for hearing and the accompanying disability reports online. In addition, SSA offers claimant representatives access to claimant's eFolders through the Internet via ARS. Moreover, claimant representatives with access to ARS can view copies of notices stored in the eFolder. Finally, SSA has further lessened the processing burden on hearing office staff by printing and mailing notices centrally, and using CPMS data to automatically generate notices. Future efforts related to electronic services will need to focus on increasing use of these services, allowing online registration, increasing the amount of hearing data available to ARS participants, reducing CDs and paper notices for those with access to the eFolder, and expanding eFolder access to additional parties.

Appendices

APPENDIX A – Acronyms

APPENDIX B – Contents of the Electronic Disability Folder Available for View by
Claimant Representatives

APPENDIX C – Scope and Methodology

APPENDIX D – Appointed Representative Service Registration Process

Appendix A

Acronyms

ACSI	American Customer Satisfaction Index
ALJ	Administrative Law Judge
ARS	Appointed Representative Services
CD	Compact Disc
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CPMS	Case Processing and Management System
DDS	Disability Determination Services
eFolder	Electronic Disability Folder
ERE	Electronic Records Express
FO	Field Office
FY	Fiscal Year
iAppeals	Internet Appeals
ODAR	Office of Disability Adjudication and Review
SSA	Social Security Administration
U.S.C.	United States Code

Appendix B

Contents of the Electronic Disability Folder Available for View by Claimant Representatives

The electronic disability folder (eFolder) is the Social Security Administration's (SSA) electronic disability repository of data. Information housed in the eFolder comes from various SSA and disability determination services' case processing systems used to decide disability claims. SSA also adds information from external sources, such as medical providers, claimants, claimant representatives, and third parties. The eFolder contains information keyed into data entry fields, images of documents scanned or faxed into the eFolder, and electronic forms added as images.¹ The eFolder allows SSA to share disability case information without having to move a paper folder between users.

ORGANIZATION OF THE ELECTRONIC FOLDER

The eFolder, like SSA's paper modular disability folder, includes color-coded categories. The categories available for view by claimant representatives via Electronic Records Express access are as follows:

- Payment Documents/Decisions (Yellow)
- Jurisdictional Documents and Notices (Red)
- Non-Disability Related Development (Orange)
- Disability Related Development (Blue)
- Medical Records (Yellow)

The screenshot shows a web-based application titled "Electronic Records Express Access to Electronic Folder". At the top, there are user details: "Claimant: New Case", "Claimant SSN: 000-00-0000", "Claim Type: T2", "Level: Hearing", "Last Change: 08/17/2010", "Application: 10/16/2008", "Alleged Onset: 05/15/2006", and "Last Insured: 12/31/2010". Below this is a navigation bar with tabs for "Case Documents" (selected) and "Exhibit List". Under "Case Documents", there are buttons for "Expand All", "Collapse All", "Select All", and "Deselect All". A list of categories is shown with their respective item counts and page counts:

- A. Payment Documents/Decisions: Items: 3, Page Count: 0
- B. Jurisdictional Documents/Notices: Items: 2, Page Count: 0
- C. Non-Disability Development: Items: 3, Page Count: 0
- D. Disability Related Development: Items: 4, Page Count: 0
- E. Medical Records: Items: 56, Page Count: 0

At the bottom of the page are several buttons: "Download Selected to Zip", "Download Selected to PDF", "Upload New File", "New Case Search", "Log Out", and "Cancel".

¹ SSA Program Operations Manual System DI 80650.020—*The Electronic Folder*, Effective Date: June 08, 2009.

Appendix C

Scope and Methodology

To address our objective, we:

- Reviewed applicable sections of the *Social Security Act* and the Social Security Administration's (SSA) regulations, policies, and procedures, including applicable sections of the Hearings, Appeals and Litigation Law manual.
- Researched prior Office of the Inspector General and Government Accountability Office reports.
- Consulted with the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review's (ODAR) managers and staff in Headquarters and the Chicago Regional Office to obtain updated information on the current status of the ODAR automation initiatives addressed in this report, including (1) Internet Appeals (iAppeals); (2) Appointed Representative Services (ARS); (3) Electronic Records Express (ERE); (4) automated and electronic hearing notices to claimants and claimants' representatives; and (5) reduction in compact disc use for the transfer of claimant information.
- Interviewed staff in SSA's Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Operations, Office of Electronic Services, associated with the implementation and maintenance of iAppeals, ARS, and ERE.
- Gathered and reviewed Agency information and statistics on iAppeals, ARS, ERE, and notice processing, as well as disability workloads in Fiscal Years 2008 through 2010.

Our review was limited in scope to analyzing iAppeals, ARS, ERE, and hearing notice data, as supplied to us by the Agency. As such, we relied on the representations of Agency personnel indicating the data reported to us were complete and accurate to the best of their awareness and ability. Accordingly, our work did not constitute an audit of such information. We conducted our review from April to June 2011 in Chicago, Illinois, and Falls Church, Virginia. The principle entity audited was the Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Disability Adjudication and Review. We conducted our work in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*.

Appointed Representative Service Registration Process

The Appointed Representative Service (ARS) enrollment process includes a number of steps:

1. The Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) mails the claimant representative a notice inviting this individual to a hearing office for in-person registration. The invitation includes a *Registration for Appointed Representative Services and Direct Payment* (Form SSA-1699).
2. The claimant representative completes the SSA-1699 and sends it to ODAR.
3. Upon receiving the completed SSA-1699, ODAR mails the claimant representative Agency-issued user and representative identification numbers. The user identification is for accessing the Website, and the representative identification number helps SSA identify representatives for official business purposes.
4. Upon receiving these identification numbers, the claimant representative visits a hearing office to complete the enrollment process. Claimant representatives are asked to bring a copy of the invitation, a text-enabled cellular telephone, and a valid government-issued identification.
5. After ODAR staff verifies the claimant representative's identification, the claimant representative is provided an ARS password. However, in addition to this password, the claimant representative will also need to obtain a unique password via text mail as part of each entry into ARS. This text password is valid for approximately 10 minutes.

DISTRIBUTION SCHEDULE

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Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on the Budget, House of Representatives

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Chairman and Ranking Minority, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate

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Social Security Advisory Board

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The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is comprised of an Office of Audit (OA), Office of Investigations (OI), Office of the Counsel to the Inspector General (OCIG), Office of External Relations (OER), and Office of Technology and Resource Management (OTRM). To ensure compliance with policies and procedures, internal controls, and professional standards, the OIG also has a comprehensive Professional Responsibility and Quality Assurance program.

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OA conducts financial and performance audits of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) programs and operations and makes recommendations to ensure program objectives are achieved effectively and efficiently. Financial audits assess whether SSA's financial statements fairly present SSA's financial position, results of operations, and cash flow. Performance audits review the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of SSA's programs and operations. OA also conducts short-term management reviews and program evaluations on issues of concern to SSA, Congress, and the general public.

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OI conducts investigations related to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement in SSA programs and operations. This includes wrongdoing by applicants, beneficiaries, contractors, third parties, or SSA employees performing their official duties. This office serves as liaison to the Department of Justice on all matters relating to the investigation of SSA programs and personnel. OI also conducts joint investigations with other Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies.

Office of the Counsel to the Inspector General

OCIG provides independent legal advice and counsel to the IG on various matters, including statutes, regulations, legislation, and policy directives. OCIG also advises the IG on investigative procedures and techniques, as well as on legal implications and conclusions to be drawn from audit and investigative material. Also, OCIG administers the Civil Monetary Penalty program.

Office of External Relations

OER manages OIG's external and public affairs programs, and serves as the principal advisor on news releases and in providing information to the various news reporting services. OER develops OIG's media and public information policies, directs OIG's external and public affairs programs, and serves as the primary contact for those seeking information about OIG. OER prepares OIG publications, speeches, and presentations to internal and external organizations, and responds to Congressional correspondence.

Office of Technology and Resource Management

OTRM supports OIG by providing information management and systems security. OTRM also coordinates OIG's budget, procurement, telecommunications, facilities, and human resources. In addition, OTRM is the focal point for OIG's strategic planning function, and the development and monitoring of performance measures. In addition, OTRM receives and assigns for action allegations of criminal and administrative violations of Social Security laws, identifies fugitives receiving benefit payments from SSA, and provides technological assistance to investigations.