

# Hearing Office Average Processing Times

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September 2015

Office of Audit Report Summary

### Background

We are issuing this report to convey information related to average processing time (APT) at the Social Security Administration's (SSA) hearing offices.

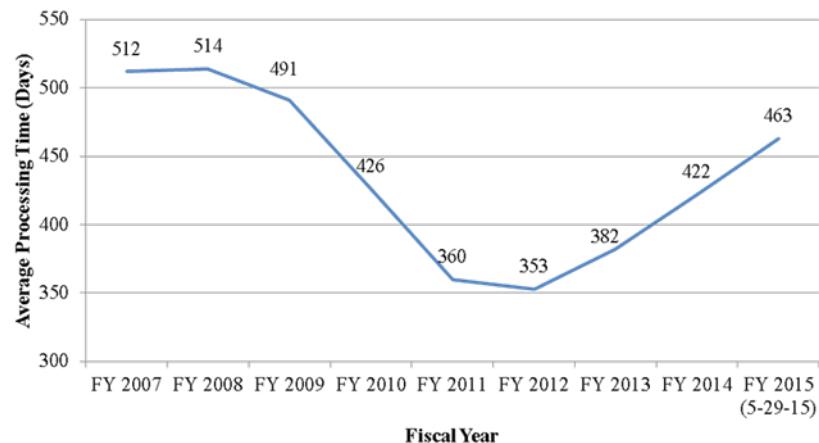
Claimants who are denied disability benefits at a State disability determination services can appeal the decision to an administrative law judge (ALJ) in the Agency's Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR). SSA maintains 164 hearing and satellite offices as well as 5 National Hearing Centers in 47 of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

ODAR's initial appeals process generally entails a hearing before an ALJ as well as the participation of expert witnesses, as appropriate. These hearings can be in-person or via a videoconference.

SSA has a long-term goal of completing the average initial appeals process, from the time it receives the hearing request to the final decision on the case, in an average of 270 days. The Agency calls this the APT.

### Summary

As of May 2015, ODAR's national APT for hearing decisions was 463 days. APT has been increasing since Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, when it averaged 353 days. The Agency's performance plan expects APT to be 470 days at the end of FY 2015 and 490 days at the end of FY 2016.



Three of SSA's 10 regions had an APT that exceeded the national average. The Denver Region maintained the lowest APT of 391 days, whereas the Atlanta Region had the highest APT of 508 days—a 117-day variance.

We also reviewed APT at hearing offices in the 10 largest States to identify variances. For example, in May 2015, we found 15 of the 17 hearing offices in California had an APT better than the national average, whereas all 8 offices in Florida had an APT that was worse than the national average. As a result, someone living in Miami, Florida, would wait about 300 days (about 10 months) longer for a hearing than someone living in Orange, California.

ODAR managers said they had a number of tools to address APT issues at hearing offices, including national and regional assistance with case adjudication, case pulling, and decision writing. The Agency was also expanding its hearing capacity through additional hiring and new offices.