

Payments to Individuals Incarcerated in New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision Facilities

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To identify individuals who improperly received payments while incarcerated in New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (NYSDOCCS) facilities and determine why these individuals' payments were not timely suspended/terminated.

Background

The *Social Security Act* generally prohibits payments to individuals confined to a jail, prison, or certain other public institutions for committing a crime.

In September 2016, we obtained data from the NYSDOCCS that identified the personally identifiable information of approximately 177,000 prisoners incarcerated in New York correctional facilities. We matched the file against Social Security payment records to identify inmates who may have improperly received Social Security Administration (SSA) payments while incarcerated.

Findings

We identified 49 inmates who received approximately \$781,000 in improper payments while incarcerated in NYSDOCCS facilities. In 24 cases, SSA's Prisoner Update Processing System (PUPS) did not contain the inmates' most recent confinement information. We did not determine whether prison facilities reported the confinement information to SSA and could not otherwise explain why the confinement information did not appear on SSA records.

In the other 25 cases, PUPS contained the inmates' confinement information; however, SSA did not suspend the benefit payments. For these cases, SSA's systems should have alerted Agency staff to suspend/terminate the benefits. We do not know whether the alerts failed to generate or SSA staff failed to act on the alerts.

We note this is a small number of errors compared to the 4,549 instances in Fiscal Year 2017 where SSA's receipt of timely confinement information from New York prison facilities resulted in the suspension of SSA payments.

Upon notification of these cases, New York Region Operations personnel corrected, or were correcting, these payment errors. Suspension of these payments will prevent approximately \$212,000 in additional overpayments over a 12-month period.

Conclusion

SSA corrected, or was correcting, these cases. Further, SSA stated it was evaluating the feasibility of obtaining and periodically processing prisoner census files to stop improper payments. Therefore, we made no recommendations for corrective action.

SSA stated it is committed to improving its efforts to collect updated and accurate incarceration information from state departments of correction. SSA also stated it issued processing reminders that contained an updated guide to assist staff in processing prisoner cases, and will continue to explore ways to minimize the risk of improper payments to incarcerated individuals.