

The Social Security Administration's Use of Insight Software to Identify Potential Anomalies in Hearing Decisions

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) use of Insight software to identify potential anomalies in hearing decisions.

Background

Staff in SSA's Office of Appellate Operations (OAO) developed Insight to flag potential errors in hearing decisions issued by administrative law judges (ALJ) in the Office of Hearings Operations (OHO). OAO analysts use Insight to analyze hearing decisions, and make recommendations to OAO adjudicators to affirm, modify, reverse, or remand ALJ hearing decisions. OAO's goal for Insight is to improve the quality, consistency, and timeliness of the disability adjudication process.

Within OHO, Insight offers case-specific information, tools, and quality feedback designed to assist ALJs and decision writers draft high-quality decisions. In SSA's *Compassionate And REmarkable Service* plan, which was developed to help address the growing hearings backlog, the Agency stated Insight should improve the quality of draft hearing decisions, thus decreasing the number of cases OAO remands to OHO.

Findings

SSA uses Insight to identify potential anomalies—that is, policy compliance and internal consistency errors—in hearing decisions. However, beyond two OAO studies and OHO usage statistics, SSA was not regularly tracking management information to determine whether Insight was meeting its goals. In addition, OHO made Insight use mandatory for its decision writers for fully favorable decisions, while its use remained voluntary for OAO users. OHO plans to expand the use of Insight further and integrate it into all compatible electronic decisional templates in FY 2020.

Also, some users reported accuracy issues with the quality flags Insight identified. Further, OAO had not consulted with the Office of Retirement and Disability Policy—the policy lead for SSA that is expected to work with other SSA departments to ensure program policy is consistent—about whether the quality flags Insight generated adequately identified policy compliance errors in hearing-level decisions.

Recommendations

We recommend SSA:

1. Develop metrics to determine whether Insight is achieving its goals.
2. Determine whether Insight should be made mandatory for OAO analysts.
3. Ensure the Office of Retirement and Disability Policy reviews the Insight flags to ensure policy compliance.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.