



## SOCIAL SECURITY

### **MEMORANDUM**

**Date:** September 25, 2009 **Refer To:**

**To:** The Commissioner

**From:** Inspector General

**Subject:** Aged Claims at the Hearing Level (A-12-08-18071)

The attached final report presents the results of our audit. Our objectives were to (1) assess the age of pending claims in the hearings backlog, (2) identify obstacles that prevent claims from being processed timely, and (3) identify best practices that can assist in reducing the aged case backlog.

Please provide within 60 days a corrective action plan that addresses each recommendation. If you wish to discuss the final report, please call me or have your staff contact Steven L. Schaeffer, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, at (410) 965-9700.



Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.

Attachment

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**OFFICE OF  
THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

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**SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION**

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**AGED CLAIMS  
AT THE HEARING LEVEL**

September 2009

**A-12-08-18071**

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**AUDIT REPORT**

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## 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.

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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.

# *Executive Summary*

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## **OBJECTIVE**

Our objectives were to (1) assess the age of the pending claims in the hearings backlog, (2) identify obstacles that prevent claims from being processed timely, and (3) identify best practices that can assist in reducing the aged claim backlog.

## **BACKGROUND**

Since Fiscal Year (FY) 2000, hearing receipts have generally exceeded dispositions, resulting in an increase in the number of hearings pending and aging claims. As the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) reported, there were 310,852 pending claims at the end of FY 2000. This number increased to 760,813 claims by the end of FY 2008. In FY 2007, the Agency began the *Aged Claim* initiative, which emphasized processing the oldest claims in the backlog.

## **RESULTS OF REVIEW**

At the beginning of FY 2009, approximately 38 percent of the pending claims exceeded 1 year in age, and about 4 percent exceeded 2 years. While the percent and number of aged claims over 1 year old have stabilized, the number of such claims was three times higher than it was at the end of FY 2002. ODAR's managers said that (1) a lack of resources, (2) conflicting priorities in the past, and (3) misplaced or time-consuming claims have added to the backlog of aged claims. The *Aged Claim* initiative has successfully targeted aged claims and focused hearing offices' efforts on this workload. ODAR has implemented related initiatives, including (1) realignment of service areas, (2) case transfers, (3) video hearings, (4) National Hearing Centers, and (5) informal remands to disability determination services to assist regions and hearing offices in processing large aged workloads. We believe that as the National Hearing Centers expand their workloads, they should be integrated with the aged case workload. The best practices that helped reduce aged claims included sustained leadership and focus, clear workload milestones, flexibility in moving workloads between offices, and use of management information reports.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As part of this effort, we recommend the Social Security Administration (SSA):

- Ensure sustained focus on working the oldest claims first even after the *Aged Claim* initiative has ended.
- Instruct field office managers on the importance of providing claim folders to the hearing offices to allow for timely processing.
- As the National Hearing Centers expand their workload, ensure they are integrated into Agency efforts to minimize the volume of aged claims.

## **AGENCY COMMENTS**

SSA agreed with our recommendations (see Appendix F).

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# *Introduction*

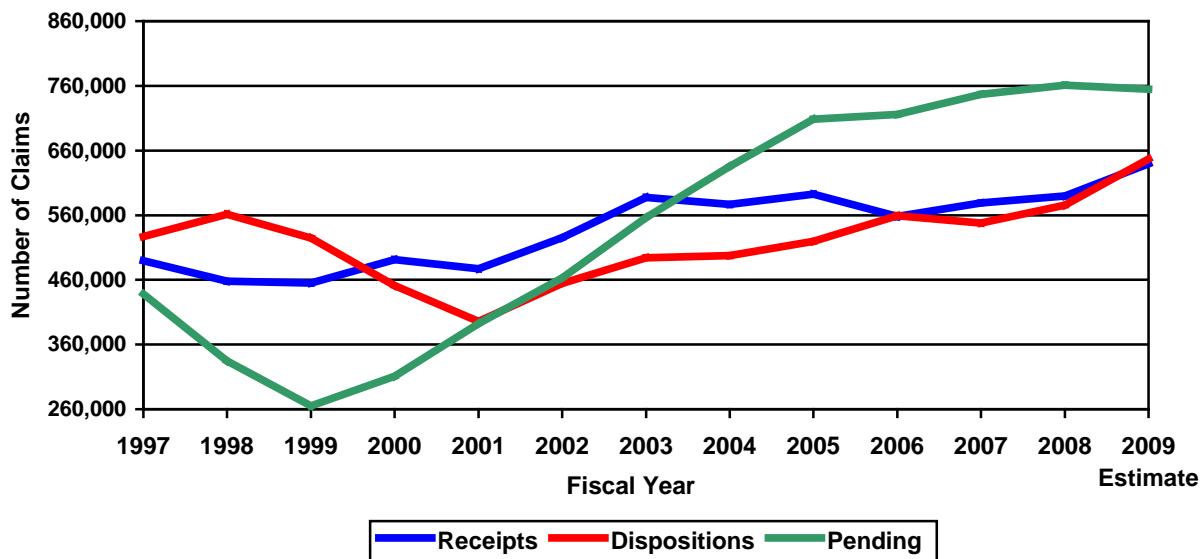
## **OBJECTIVE**

Our objectives were to (1) assess the age of the pending claims in the hearings backlog, (2) identify obstacles that prevent claims from being processed timely, and (3) identify best practices that can assist in reducing the aged claim backlog.

## **BACKGROUND**

Since Fiscal Year (FY) 2000, hearing receipts have generally exceeded dispositions, resulting in an increase in the number of hearings pending (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Hearing Workload Trends  
(Social Security Administration Claims)**



While there were 310,852 pending claims at the end of FY 2000, this number increased to 760,813 claims by the end of FY 2008.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the processing time of closed claims has increased. For example, according to ODAR, the average processing time for a claim was 258 days in FY 2000 but increased to 514 days in FY 2008.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is projecting there will be 647,000 dispositions with 755,000 pending at the end of FY 2009, which represents approximately 6,000 fewer cases in the pending backlog compared to the end of FY 2008, even with

<sup>1</sup> According to the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) management, the actual number of pending claims at the end of April 2009 dropped below the opening number of pending claims at the beginning of FY 2009.

the increase in hearing requests due to the current economy.<sup>2</sup> In his March 24, 2009 testimony before the Subcommittees on Social Security and Family Support, Commissioner Astrue stated that SSA may receive approximately 50,000 more hearing requests in FY 2009 than in FY 2008.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the Commissioner stated the Agency is still on track to eliminate the hearings backlog by 2013.

In FY 2007, SSA began the *Aged Claim* initiative with emphasis on processing the oldest claims in the backlog.<sup>4</sup> In his May 2007 testimony before Congress, Commissioner Astrue stated, "I consider this initiative to be a moral imperative. An applicant should not have to wait three or four years for his or her day in court."<sup>5</sup> As shown in Table 1, the Agency has established a target to eliminate a specific aged workload for each FY.

**Table 1: Targeted Age of Claims Under the Aged Claim Initiative**

Fiscal Year	Targeted Age of Claims	Number of Identified Claims
2007	1,000 days or older	63,770
2008	900 days or older	135,160
2009	850 days or older	166,838

**Note:** SSA identified these claims by determining whether the case was already the targeted age or would be by the end of the FY.

Figure 2 illustrates the progress ODAR has made while eliminating these aged cases for each of the last three fiscal years. ODAR has successfully eliminated the targeted aged workloads in FY 2007 and FY 2008, and, at the end of June 2009, had slightly more than 16,600 of the 850-day old claims left to process.

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<sup>2</sup> SSA, *FY 2010 Annual Performance Plan*.

<sup>3</sup> According to SSA, disability determination service (DDS) backlogs have prevented more claims from being sent to the hearing offices.

<sup>4</sup> SSA has undertaken over 30 initiatives in 4 areas to eliminate the backlog and prevent its recurrence: (1) compassionate allowances; (2) improving performance; (3) increasing adjudicatory capacity; and (4) increasing efficiency with automation and business processes.

<sup>5</sup> Prepared Testimony of Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, before the Senate Finance Committee, May 23, 2007.

**Figure 2: Aged Case Projects**  
FYs 2007 to 2009

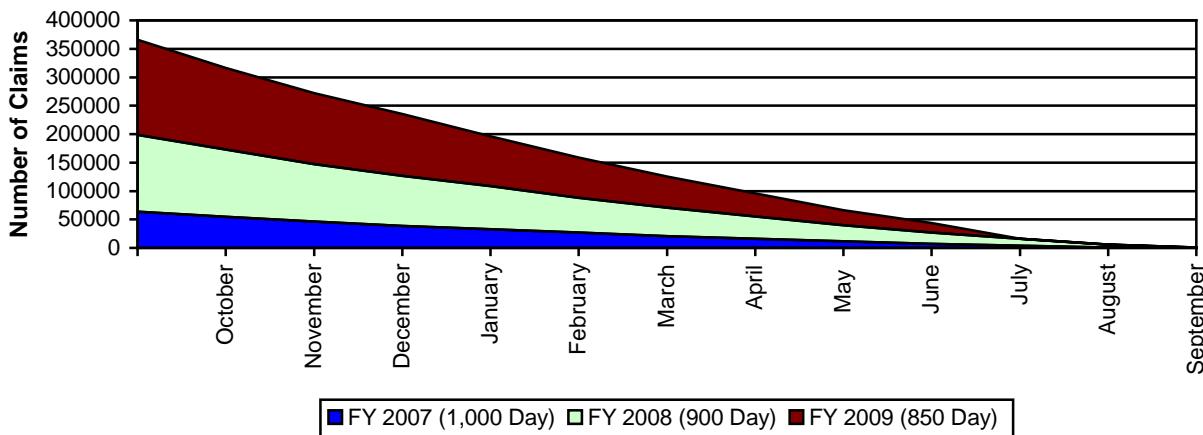
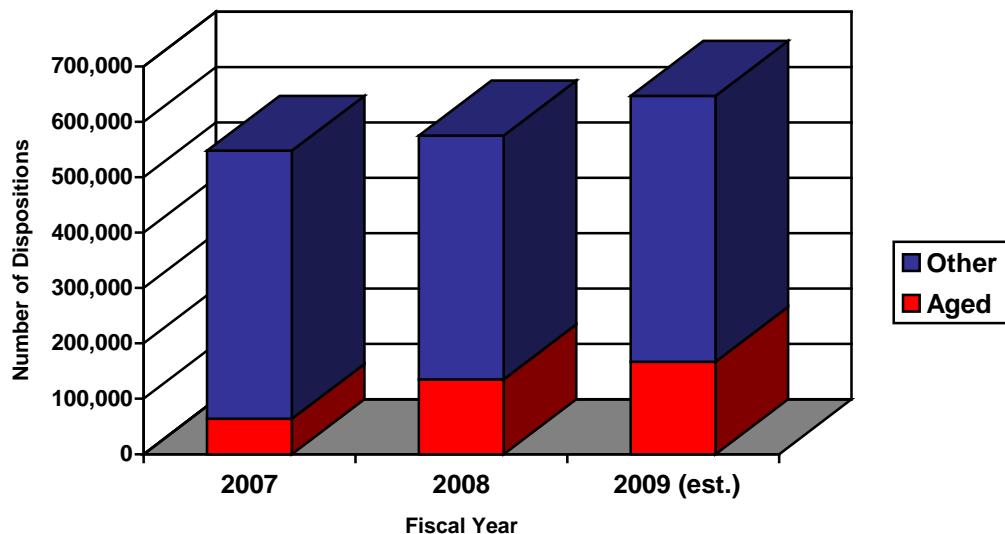


Figure 3 indicates the proportion of SSA's dispositions over the last 3 FYs dedicated to aged claims targeted under the initiative.

**Figure 3: Aged Claim Initiative as a Portion of Total Dispositions**



**Note:** For this graphic, we are using "aged" as defined by ODAR in its initiative.

To accomplish the processing of the targeted aged claims by the end of each FY, ODAR's Office of the Chief Administrative Law Judge (OCALJ) established milestones for hearing offices. Regional and hearing offices also developed plans for achieving the aged goals and devoted time to monitoring progress at their levels.

## **SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

We analyzed the age of pending claims at the end of FY 2008 to identify (1) the number of claims and percent of the pending hearings workload that were 730 days old or older, (2) potential bottlenecks in the hearings process, and (3) the best practices used to process aged claims. We summarized the aged claims by region and hearing office to identify those components with the largest aged workloads. We then interviewed regional management teams and visited hearing offices to identify best practices for eliminating processing bottlenecks.<sup>6</sup> We also analyzed aged claims closed in FYs 2007 and 2008 to identify any factors that may have contributed to the aging of the claims.

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<sup>6</sup> For a further discussion of our scope and methodology, see Appendix B. Our hearing office selection criteria can be found in Appendix C.

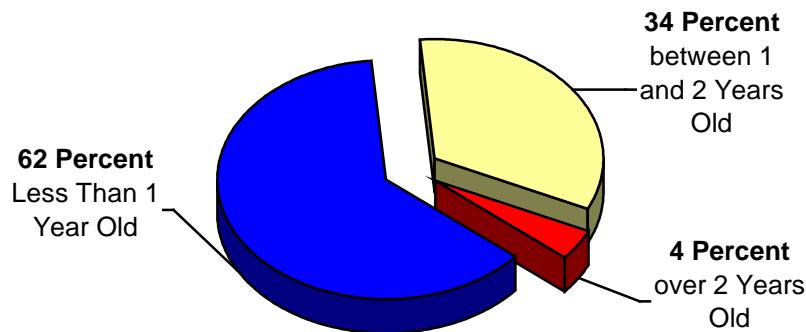
# *Results of Review*

At the beginning of FY 2009, approximately 38 percent of the pending claims exceeded 1 year in age and about 4 percent exceeded 2 years. While the percent and number of aged claims over 1 year old had stabilized, the number of these claims was three times higher than it was at the end of FY 2002. ODAR managers cite a number of reasons that led to the backlog of hearing claims, including (1) a lack of resources, (2) conflicting priorities in the past, and (3) misplaced or time-consuming claims. ODAR's *Aged Claim* initiative has successfully targeted aged claims and focused hearing offices' efforts on this workload. ODAR has implemented a number of related initiatives, including *Service Area Realignments*, *Video Hearings*, the *National Hearing Centers* and *Informal Remands* to the DDSs, to assist regions and hearing offices in processing large aged workloads. We believe that as the National Hearing Centers expand their workloads, they should be integrated with the aged case workload. Sustained leadership and focus, clear workload milestones, flexibility in moving workloads between offices, and use of management information reports has allowed ODAR to reduce aged claims and return to its earlier policy of hearing the oldest claims first.

## **NATIONAL PENDING CLAIMS**

Over 286,000 (about 38 percent) of the 760,813 pending claims were over 1 year old at the beginning of FY 2009.<sup>7</sup> About 4 percent of the pending claims exceeded 2 years in age (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Age of Pending Claims  
(As of the Beginning of FY 2009)**

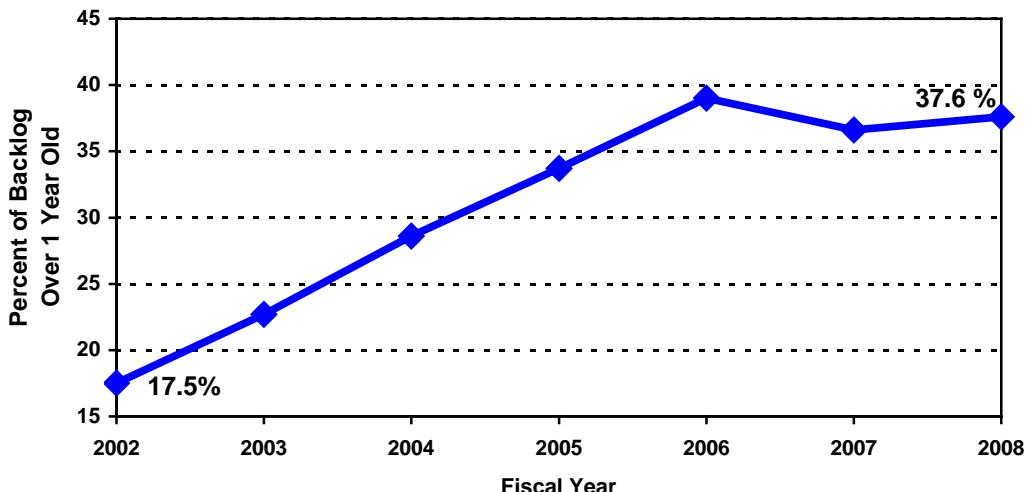


<sup>7</sup> Pending data as of the end of October 2008.

## 1-YEAR-OLD CLAIMS

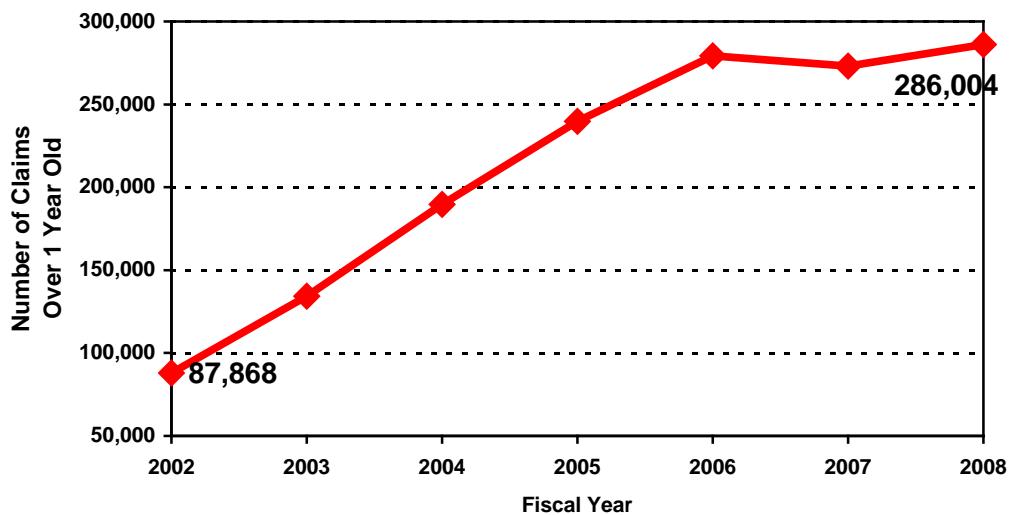
The percent of pending claims over 1 year old at the beginning of FY 2009 was about 38 percent of total pending claims (see Figure 5). However, this rate had leveled off since peaking in FY 2006. As noted earlier, the *Aged Claim* initiative started in FY 2007 when approximately 64,000 aged claims were targeted for processing. The percent of claims 1 year or older pending in FY 2008 was more than twice as high as the rate in FY 2002.

**Figure 5: Percent of Hearing Backlog Over 1 Year Old**



Moreover, since the backlog has continued to grow, the total number of claims over 1 year old is higher than prior years (see Figure 6). The number of claims over 1 year old at the end of FY 2008 was more than three times greater than it was at the end of FY 2002.

**Figure 6: Number of Claims in the Backlog Over 1 Year Old**



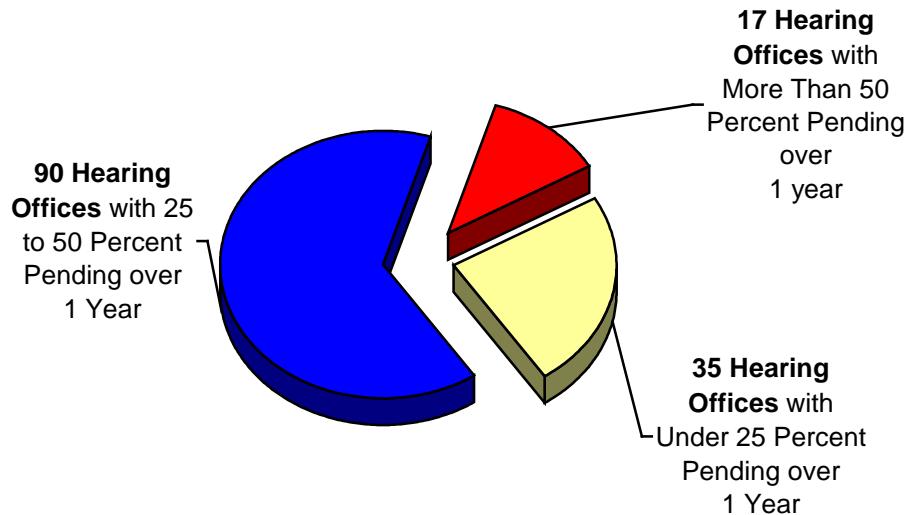
In the 10 ODAR regions, we found that the percent of pending claims 1 year or older at the beginning of FY 2009 ranged from 19.1 percent in the Boston Region to 49.4 percent in the Chicago Region. The percent for each region is shown in Table 2.

Of the 142 hearing offices, 17 had more than 50 percent of their pending workloads over 1 year old, while 35 hearing offices had less than 25 percent of their pending workloads over 1 year old (see Figure 7).

**Table 2: Percent of Each Region's Workload Pending for 1 Year or More (As of the Beginning of FY 2009)**

Region	Percent of Workload Pending 1 Year or More
Region I: Boston	19.1
Region II: New York	33.1
Region III: Philadelphia	24.8
Region IV: Atlanta	41.6
Region V: Chicago	49.4
Region VI: Dallas	26.9
Region VII: Kansas City	41.6
Region VIII: Denver	30.1
Region IX: San Francisco	30.1
Region X: Seattle	43.3

**Figure 7: Percent of Hearing Office Pending Workloads Over 1 Year Old (As of the Beginning of FY 2009)**



## 2-YEAR-OLD CLAIMS

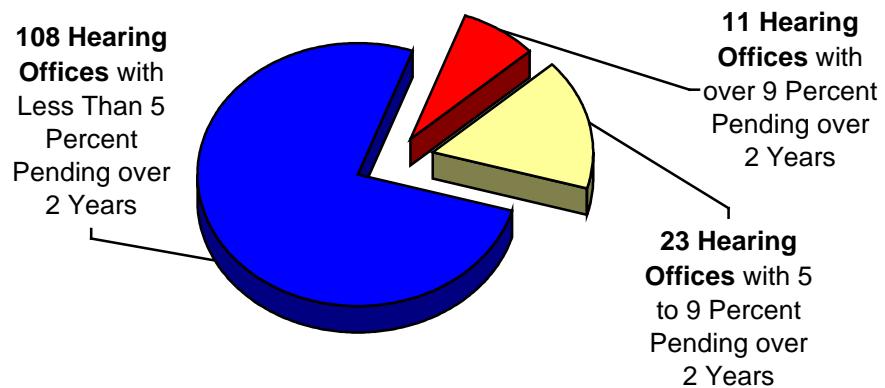
Of the 10 ODAR regions, we found that the percent of pending claims 2 years or older the beginning of FY 2009 ranged from 0.5 percent in the Dallas Region to 7.6 percent in the Chicago Region (see Table 3 for each region's percent).<sup>8</sup> According to the Chicago Regional Management Team, the Chicago Region has been under-resourced for years, limiting its ability to hire administrative law judges (ALJ) and support staff. This under-funding has caused claims to backlog and age.

**Table 3: Percent of Each Region's Workload Pending for 2 Years or More (As of the Beginning of FY 2009)**

Region	Percent of Workload Pending 2 Years or More
Region I: Boston	1.9
Region II: New York	2.5
Region III: Philadelphia	0.8
Region IV: Atlanta	4.9
Region V: Chicago	7.6
Region VI: Dallas	0.5
Region VII: Kansas City	4.3
Region VIII: Denver	0.6
Region IX: San Francisco	3.8
Region X: Seattle	3.7

Of the 142 hearing offices, we found that 11 hearing offices had 9 percent or more of their pending workloads over 2 years old. However, 108 hearing offices had less than 5 percent of their pending workloads over 2 years old (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Percent of Hearing Office Pending Workloads Over 2 Years Old (At the Beginning of FY 2009)**



The 11 hearing offices with over 9 percent of their total pending workload over 2 years old are provided in Table 4. At 15 percent of its pending workload, the Jackson, Mississippi, Hearing Office had the largest percentage of aged backlog of all hearing offices in the country. Ten of the 11 hearing offices with the largest aged backlogs are

<sup>8</sup> For additional analysis of the 2-year-old claims, see Appendix D.

located in the Atlanta or Chicago Regions. As shown in Table 3, these two regions had the highest percent of workloads pending over 2 years in the nation.

**Table 4: Hearing Offices with the Largest 2-Year Pending Workloads  
(As of the Beginning of FY 2009)**

Hearing Office	Region	Total Pending	Total Aged	Aged as a Percent of Total Pending
Jackson, Mississippi	Atlanta	7,575	1,145	15
Lansing, Michigan	Chicago	6,731	939	14
Indianapolis, Indiana	Chicago	11,056	1,533	14
Greenville, South Carolina	Atlanta	9,600	1,316	14
Oak Park, Michigan	Chicago	10,876	1,348	12
Oak Brook, Illinois	Chicago	4,428	482	11
Greensboro, North Carolina	Atlanta	9,805	1,055	11
Miami, Florida	Atlanta	4,637	492	11
Atlanta (North), Georgia	Atlanta	11,991	1,255	10
Grand Rapids, Michigan	Chicago	8,499	888	10
Tucson, Arizona	San Francisco	2,664	262	10

## REASONS FOR AGED CLAIMS

ODAR managers cite a number of reasons that led to the backlog of hearing claims, including (1) a lack of resources, (2) conflicting priorities, and (3) misplaced or time-consuming claims. According to the OCALJ, factors contributing to high pending workloads resulting in aged claims include high receipts, low staffing ratios in hearing offices, varying staff productivity, and space availability. Regional and hearing office managers cited similar factors, as well as such additional factors as conflicting processing time goals, case postponements, misplaced claims, and claims that are difficult to schedule, such as hearings at prisons.

## RESOURCES

ODAR has not always been able to obtain the ALJs it needed to process its workload. For example, in FY 2000, when the pending backlog was growing, ODAR was precluded from hiring ALJs because of ongoing litigation.<sup>9</sup> Since FY 2004, ODAR has been hiring additional ALJs and hearing office staff. The FY 2009 appropriation, as well as \$500 million in additional funding related to processing disability and retirement workloads<sup>10</sup> should assist ODAR in expanding the resources available to handle its

<sup>9</sup> With the exception of a 1-time hiring of 126 ALJs in early FY 2002, ODAR was precluded from hiring ALJs between 1999 and 2004 because of the Azdell litigation. In 2004, OPM reactivated the ALJ register, and ODAR was able to hire 103 ALJs in the spring and summer of 2004.

<sup>10</sup> These additional funds were provided under the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*, Pub. L. No. 111-5, Division A, Title VIII (H.R. 1-71 to H.R. 1-72).

workloads.<sup>11</sup> For example, at the time of our review, ODAR stated it plans to hire approximately 157 ALJs and 850 support staff in the field in FY 2009. In addition, the Agency is opening 14 new hearing offices nationwide. These additional resources should assist ODAR to keep dispositions above receipts and eliminate the backlog—both aged claims and regular claims.<sup>12</sup>

## CONFLICTING PRIORITIES

Agency policy and procedures require that hearing offices process the oldest claims first. ODAR's Hearings, Appeals and Litigation Law (HALLEX) manual states "The Hearing Office Chief ALJ generally assigns claims to ALJs from the master docket on a rotational basis, with the earliest (i.e., oldest) [requests for hearings] receiving priority, unless there is a special situation which requires a change in the order in which a case is assigned."<sup>13</sup> The exceptions to this general rule include such special situations as critical claims, remands, and dismissals.<sup>14</sup>

In our interviews, one Regional Chief ALJ stated that conflicting timeliness goals in the past contributed to hearing offices ignoring the oldest claims. For instance, during FY 2002, ODAR set timeliness goals for percent of claims processed in 180 days and 270 days. This observation is consistent with comments made during earlier audits. In 2003, during audit work on best practices at hearing offices,<sup>15</sup> an OCALJ official noted that the hearing offices were facing competing goals on dispositions and timeliness. Since aged claims could take more time to process, they would be put aside to allow an office to process more claims and meet shorter timeliness goals. This official questioned the logic of having goals that ran counter to the "oldest claims first" approach. Our review of Agency reports found examples of this focus on shorter-term goals, such as a FY 2002 annual report stating, "Of the more than 532,000 claims processed, we decided nearly 18 percent within 180 days of the request for hearing, slightly below our 20 percent goal."<sup>16</sup>

Our 2004 report on best practices<sup>17</sup> cited the processing of the oldest claims first as a best practice to improve timeliness and found that all 12 high-performing offices we contacted were following this policy. In our report, we noted, "We realize that

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<sup>11</sup> We are conducting a separate set of reviews assessing ODAR's use of the Recovery Act funds.

<sup>12</sup> ODAR's goal for eliminating the backlog is FY 2013.

<sup>13</sup> SSA, HALLEX I-2-1-55, A—Assignment of Service Area Cases to Administrative Law Judges.

<sup>14</sup> SSA, HALLEX I-2-1-55, D—Assignment of Service Area Cases to Administrative Law Judges.

<sup>15</sup> SSA Office of the Inspector General (OIG), *Best Practices in the Highest Producing Hearing Offices* (A-12-04-14020), August 2004.

<sup>16</sup> SSA, *Office of Hearings and Appeals: 2002 Annual Report*, November 2002.

<sup>17</sup> SSA OIG, *Best Practices in the Highest Producing Hearing Offices* (A-12-04-14020), August 2004.

processing the oldest claims is time consuming, and takes resources away from meeting disposition goals; however...processing the oldest claims first should be a priority since it serves the claimants who have been waiting the longest." The *Aged Claim* initiative is a clear indication that ODAR is again focusing on this "oldest case first" methodology.

## MISPLACED OR TIME-CONSUMING CLAIMS

Misplaced or hard to schedule claims were also cited as contributing to aged claims. In our interviews with hearing office management teams, we were told that prison hearings can be difficult to schedule because prisoners may move, and the hearing needs to be rescheduled.<sup>18</sup> In addition, claimants or their representatives may request that a hearing be rescheduled, which can lengthen the time it takes to hear the case.<sup>19</sup> Finally, OCALJ managers noted that some claims were old before the hearing office received them. When we spoke to OCALJ staff about the issue of misplaced claims, we were provided with a listing of 721 claims that were already old when they arrived at the hearing office. The average age of these claims was 833 days. OCALJ staff stated these claims were misplaced at the field offices and sent to the hearing office after being located.<sup>20</sup>

## AGENCY INITIATIVES TO REDUCE AGED CLAIMS

In addition to the *Aged Claim* initiative, which has successfully targeted aged claims and focused hearing offices' efforts on this workload, SSA has a number of other initiatives to assist in reducing the number of aged claims. These initiatives include (1) *Service Area Realignments* (SAR), (2) *National Hearing Centers* (NHC), (3) *Video Hearings*, and (4) *Informal Remands*.

### AGED CLAIM INITIATIVE

ODAR's *Aged Claim* initiative has successfully targeted aged claims and focused hearing offices' efforts on this workload. ODAR reported that by the end of FY 2007, the *Aged Claim* initiative had eliminated most of the 63,770 claims that would be at least

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<sup>18</sup> We are planning to conduct a separate review on prison hearings.

<sup>19</sup> In our June 2008 report, *Quick Response Evaluation: Timeliness of Medical Evidence at Hearing Offices* (A-05-08-28106), we noted that about 52,000 hearing claims, or 9 percent of the FY 2007 dispositions, were postponed for a variety of reasons, including the "representative request," "claimant was unavailable," and "representative was unavailable."

<sup>20</sup> We discussed the need for greater attention on missing claims in our March 2007 audit of *Management's Use of Workload Status Reports at Hearing Offices* (A-12-06-26130). The 721 claims were sent to 129 different hearing offices, with the Bronx Hearing Office receiving the most (39 claims). We randomly reviewed 45 of the 721 claims and discovered that 13 were electronic folders and 32 were paper folders.

1,000 days old by the end of the FY.<sup>21</sup> After adjudicating the 1,000-day old claims, ODAR disposed of the majority of the 135,160 targeted aged claims that would be over 900 days old by the end of FY 2008.<sup>22</sup> As noted earlier, the new target under the *Aged Claim* initiative is claims that will be 850 days old by the end of FY 2009. ODAR reported that as of the end of June 2009, about 16,600 of these claims were still awaiting disposition.

During this period, OCALJ was also identifying aged claims, highlighting the priority claims, and setting milestones for working down these aged claims. For instance, in a December 21, 2007 memorandum to the 10 RCALJs,<sup>23</sup> the Chief ALJ (CALJ) addressed bi-weekly reports that were to be sent to each RCALJ identifying<sup>24</sup>

- all claims that will mature to 900 days or more by the end of FY 2008;
- the top 200 aged claims pending;
- claims currently pending 1,000 days or over; and
- the top 5 claims pending in each status code.<sup>25</sup>

The CALJ also established milestones for this workload to ensure the aged claims could be worked in FY 2008, including

- February 29, 2008 - completion of claims pending *Master Docket* through *Work Up*<sup>26</sup> processes;
- June 27, 2008 - all aged claims *ALJ Review Pre-Hearing* through *Ready to Schedule* should be scheduled;
- August 15, 2008 - all claims pending assigned for *Writing*; and
- September 26, 2008 - all claims closed.

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<sup>21</sup> ODAR reported it finished FY 2007 with 108 target claims remaining or .17 percent of the anticipated workload.

<sup>22</sup> ODAR reported it finished FY 2008 with 281 target claims remaining or .21 percent of the anticipated workload.

<sup>23</sup> A similar memorandum was issued again by the CALJ to RCALJs on November 26, 2008 in relation to the 850-day old claims.

<sup>24</sup> The memorandum also identified other standard reports in the Case Processing and Management System and Disability Adjudication Reporting Tools that could be used to track the aged workload.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix E for a list of steps in the hearing process. Each step is related to a status code.

<sup>26</sup> The *Work Up* status indicates the claim has been assigned to a senior case technician for preparing exhibits and medical summaries.

RCALJs were also expected to highlight the importance of the initiative among management and staff.<sup>27</sup> Finally, each region was expected to provide the CALJ with a plan to eliminate the 900-day-old claims by the end of the FY.

ODAR met the 900-day-old claim target through the concerted efforts of the entire organization. ODAR established other initiatives including the transference of workloads, the use of the NHC, video technology, and informal remands. Most of these new initiatives allowed hearing offices from any part of the country to assist other offices. We describe these initiatives below.

### ***SERVICE AREA REALIGNMENT INITIATIVE***

A complementary initiative aimed at reducing aged claims is the SAR<sup>28</sup> initiative, which was implemented in FY 2007. The SAR initiative is directed by OCALJ and has a two-phased strategy. The first phase includes permanent interregional transfer of claims, which ODAR stated was designed to decrease aged pending workloads of heavily impacted offices between regions.<sup>29</sup> Once the flow of transfer claims began, phase two involved realigning specific SSA field offices in high workload regions to hearing offices in lower workload regions. This meant that new claims would be processed and heard in hearing offices in a different part of the country from where the claimant lived.

During FY 2008, OCALJ used the SAR initiative to rebalance pending claims in the regions (see Figure 9). In FY 2008, the Chicago and Kansas City Regions had large numbers of claims assigned to other regions as part of SAR and permanent case transfers. The Chicago Region transferred out over 30,000 claims, while the Kansas City Region transferred out over 7,500 claims. The San Francisco Region received nearly 20,000 claims, and the Boston Region received more than 6,200 claims. The National Hearing Center in Falls Church, Virginia received almost 4,400 claims in FY 2008.

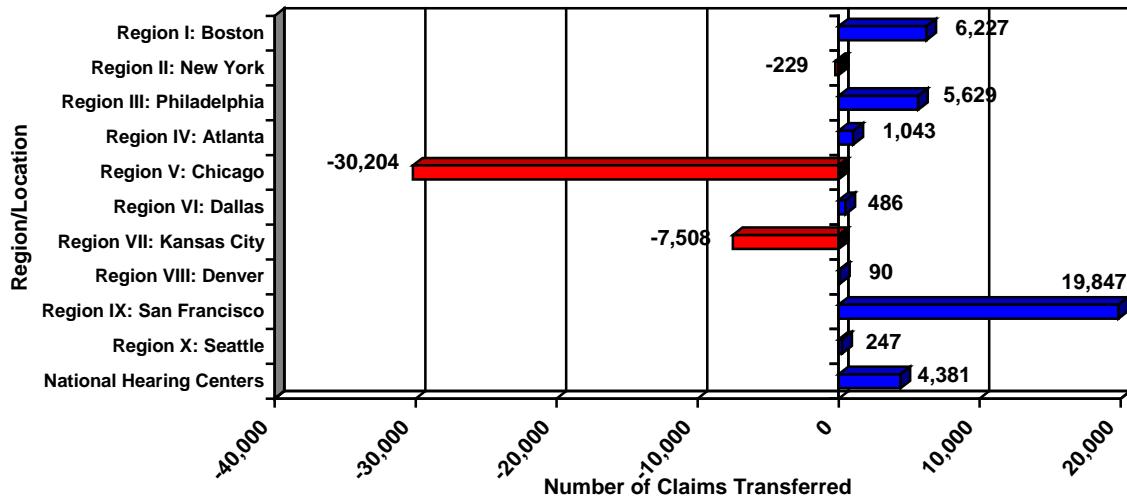
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<sup>27</sup> As noted earlier, hearing offices are focusing on an aged workload that would not have accrued to this level had the “oldest case first” policy been followed. There will always be an “aged” group in any workload, but adherence to policy would have prevented this volume of claims from exceeding 1,000 days in age.

<sup>28</sup> We are planning a separate audit of the SAR initiative.

<sup>29</sup> Other reasons claims are transferred include incorrect jurisdiction or claimant relocation. Claims are also temporarily transferred between the Regions for workload assistance such as decision writing and case pulling.

**Figure 9: Transfers Among Regions/Locations in FY 2008**



**Note:** The blue bar indicates claims were received in the Region, and the red bar indicates claims were sent from the Region.

In Table 5, we provide information on the pending claims per ALJ at the beginning of FY 2008. The significant pending counts per ALJ in the Chicago and Kansas City regions support ODAR's decision to transfer claims from these regions to other regions with smaller pending workloads. While the Atlanta region has a large aged backlog, its pending claims per ALJ is less than in Chicago or Kansas City.

**Table 5: Pending Claims per ALJ by Region at the end of FY 2008**

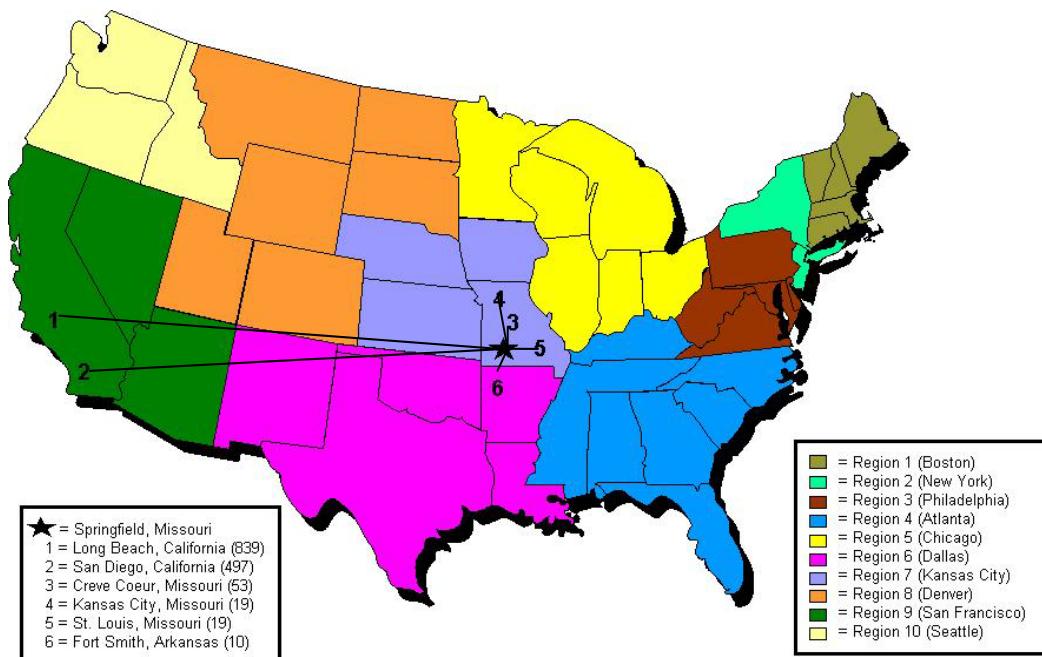
Region	Pending Claims per ALJ	Percent of Hearing Offices in Region Where Pending Claims per ALJ Exceed 1,000 claims
Region I: Boston	284	0
Region II: New York	717	29
Region III: Philadelphia	525	0
Region IV: Atlanta	789	16
Region V: Chicago	1,042	65
Region VI: Dallas	577	6
Region VII: Kansas City	974	43
Region VIII: Denver	610	0
Region IX: San Francisco	402	0
Region X: Seattle	691	0
<b>National</b>	<b>702</b>	<b>18</b>

**Note:** Information taken from our August 2008 Congressional Response Report: *Administrative Law Judge and Hearing Office Performance* (A-07-08-28094).

In Figure 10, we illustrate one example of how SAR was used to balance workloads at a hearing office. The Springfield, Missouri, Hearing Office in the Kansas City Region had an aged pending workload of 9 percent of its total workload of 4,219 claims in FY 2008.

The Springfield Hearing Office permanently transferred 1,531 claims to 60 different hearing offices in FY 2008. In terms of the top six hearing offices receiving these transferred cases, two were in the San Francisco Region, three were in the Kansas City Region (the same Region as the Springfield Hearing Office), and one was in the Dallas Region. The Long Beach, California, Hearing Office in the San Francisco Region received 839 claims, representing nearly 55 percent of total claims transferred from Springfield. In addition, the San Diego Hearing Office, also located in the San Francisco Region, received more than 32 percent of claims transferred from Springfield, or 497 claims. Overall, the San Francisco Region received most of the transferred claims from the Springfield Hearing Office in FY 2008.

**Figure 10: Permanent Claims Transfers from the Springfield, Missouri, Hearing Office in FY 2008**



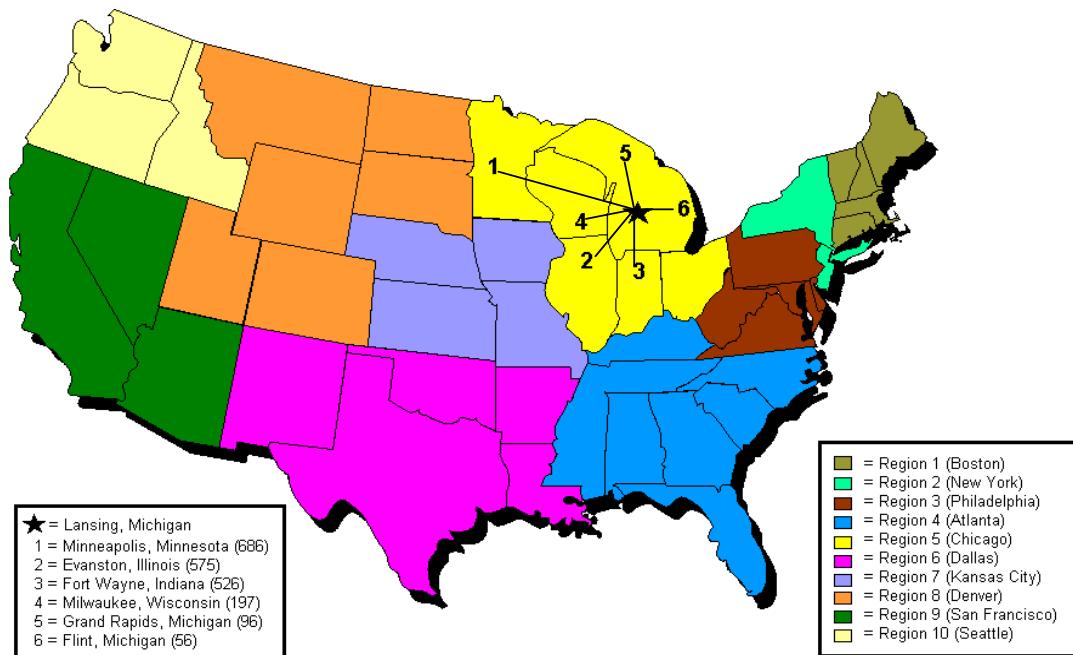
**Note:** Counts next to city names represent the number of claims transferred.

Case transfers and realignments are also occurring within regions to ensure workloads are distributed evenly and aged claims are eliminated. While the SAR initiative relates to intra-regional transfers and realignments and is directed by the OCALJ, transfers and realignments within each region are directed by each RCALJ.

For example, the Lansing, Michigan, Hearing Office in the Chicago Region transferred 2,305 claims to 77 hearing offices within the nation in FY 2008 (see Figure 11). The majority of the claims were transferred elsewhere in the Chicago Region. For example, about 686 (30 percent) of these claims went to the Minneapolis, Minnesota, Hearing Office and another 575 (25 percent) were transferred to the Evanston, Illinois, Hearing Office. These transfers helped evenly distribute the Region's workload. The Lansing Hearing Office reported an aged pending workload of 14 percent of its total workload in

FY 2008, whereas the Minneapolis and Evanston Hearing Offices had aged pending workloads of 1 percent and 6 percent, respectively. Moreover, at the beginning of FY 2008, the Minneapolis and Evanston Hearing Offices had fewer case receipts per day per ALJ compared to the Lansing Hearing Office.

**Figure 11: Permanent Claims Transfers from the Lansing, Michigan, Hearing Office in FY 2008**



**Note:** Counts next to city names represent the number of claims transferred.

## NATIONAL HEARING CENTER AND VIDEO HEARING INITIATIVES

Along with SAR, ODAR implemented the NHC initiative to assist processing claims in heavily impacted hearing offices. Under this plan, ODAR opened a NHCs in Falls Church, Virginia, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, in FY 2008. ODAR opened a third NHC in Chicago, Illinois, in June 2009 and planned a fourth NHC for Baltimore, Maryland, in July 2009. A second, related initiative is the *Video Hearing* initiative,<sup>30</sup> which was designed to increase adjudicatory capacity and efficiency with a focus on the electronic hearing process. Together, these initiatives assist ODAR with claims transferred within and between regions since they allow distant hearing offices and the NHCs to meet with claimants via video and decide claims.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> We are conducting an audit of the *Video Hearing* initiative and plan to issue a report in early FY 2010.

<sup>31</sup> ODAR has other efforts underway that will increase adjudicatory capacity at the Agency, including establishing new hearing offices in Anchorage, Alaska; Phoenix, Arizona; Tallahassee, Florida; Tampa/St. Petersburg, Florida; Covington, Georgia; Valparaiso, Indiana; Topeka, Kansas; Livonia, Michigan; Mt. Pleasant, Michigan; Fayetteville, North Carolina; Akron, Ohio; Toledo, Ohio; Auburn, Washington; and Madison, Wisconsin.

In FY 2008, the Falls Church NHC received 4,381 claim transfers and issued 2,151 decisions. The NHC had 2,230 pending claims at the beginning of FY 2009. However, we found that most of the hearing offices with the largest 2-year-old pending workloads did not have claims pending at the NHC. Of the 11 hearing offices with 10 percent or more of their pending claims 2 years or older, only claims in the Indianapolis and Oak Park Hearing Offices were pending at the NHC (see Table 4 on page 9). According to ODAR, claims transferred into the NHC come from areas of the country with the largest backlogs. All hearings conducted at the NHC are done using video conferencing equipment.

Most of the 2,230 claims pending at the NHC at the beginning of FY 2009 came from the Detroit, Michigan; Cleveland, Ohio; and Atlanta, Georgia, Hearing Offices.

- **Detroit Hearing Office:** 747 claims were pending in the NHC (7 percent of the hearing office's workload) – the Detroit Hearing Office had 10,273 pending claims with 6 percent being over 2-year old pending claims.
- **Cleveland Hearing Office:** 619 claims were pending in the NHC (6 percent of the hearing office's workload) – the Cleveland Hearing Office had 10,407 pending claims with 2 percent being over 2-year old pending claims.
- **Atlanta Hearing Office:** 457 claims pending in the NHC (6 percent of the hearing office's workload) – the Atlanta Hearing Office had 7,923 pending claims with 8 percent being over 2-year old pending claims.

### ***Informal Remand Initiative***

The *Informal Remand* initiative was developed to increase ODAR's adjudicatory capacity and reduce the paper case backlog (mostly aged claims) by having DDSs consider re-opening certain claims based on specific profiles established by the Office of Quality Performance. DDSs review these claims, and if they can make a fully favorable determination, claims are returned to SSA field offices for adjudication. Although the initiative was intended to reduce the backlog of paper claims, it was extended to electronic claims in March 2008.

According to SSA, in slightly less than 2 years since the initiative began, DDSs have processed more than 100,000 informal remands and issued fully favorable determinations in over 35,000 claims. Should the DDS not be able to make a fully favorable decision, the case is developed with updated medical evidence, if possible, and returned to ODAR. This updated medical evidence should assist the hearing offices with their own processing of these claims.

## BEST PRACTICES TO PREVENT CLAIMS FROM AGING

Based on our fieldwork and discussions with ODAR management and staff, we identified a number of best practices that contributed to the elimination of older claims:

- sustained leadership and focus on “oldest claims first” by management,
- the establishment of clear milestones for processing the aged workload,
- flexibility in the assignment of claims within and between regions, and
- use of management information reports allowing managers to identify aging claims that need to be processed or shifted to other locations to meet the initiative’s goals.

As we noted earlier, at the start of each FY, OCALJ has identified the aged claims being targeted, established processing milestones, and highlighted the management reports that can assist managers in monitoring this workload. In our discussions with the five regional management teams and six hearing office management teams,<sup>32</sup> we learned that they all are focusing their efforts on processing the oldest claims. Moreover, the use of case transfers, SAR and the NHCs by management in Headquarters, as well as the use of transfers within regions as directed by the RCALJs, has provided ODAR with additional flexibility as it eliminates the aged claims. Finally, the Case Processing and Management System and Disability Adjudication Reporting Tools management information reports have assisted managers in locating aged claims and monitoring the reduction of these claims.

Management’s focus on processing the oldest claims first has put ODAR’s hearing process back in compliance with its own policies and procedures. Sustained focus, combined with additional resources for greater hiring and new or expanded hearing offices, will assist ODAR as it reduces the overall backlog of claims and ensures each claimant timely receives his or her day in court.

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<sup>32</sup> See Appendix C for a list of the regional and hearing offices we visited or contacted.

# *Conclusion and Recommendations*

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ODAR's *Aged Claim* initiative has successfully targeted aged claims and focused hearing offices' efforts on this workload. Moreover, ODAR has implemented a number of related initiatives to process aging workloads, including *SAR*, *NHC*, *Video Hearings* and *Informal Remands*. While the number and percent of aged cases has leveled off, there are still challenges related to aging workloads. In addition, SSA will need to be diligent in addressing imbalances in aged workloads among the regional and hearing offices until new hearing offices and extra resources can begin to rebalance the workload. Finally, it is important that field offices provide the claims to the hearing offices in a timely manner so they can be timely processed. Overall, we found that the best practices for reducing the aged backlog included sustained leadership by ODAR management, establishment of clear milestones, flexibility in transferring aged workloads around the country, and the use of management information reports to identify and track aged claims.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To assist the Regions and hearing offices to reduce their aged claims workload, we recommend SSA:

1. Ensure sustained focus on working the oldest claims first even after the *Aged Claim* initiative has ended.
2. Instruct field office managers on the importance of providing claim folders to the hearing offices to allow for timely processing.
3. As the NHCs expand their workload, ensure they are integrated into Agency efforts to minimize the volume of aged claims.

## **AGENCY COMMENTS**

SSA agreed with our recommendations (see Appendix F).

# Appendices

## **Appendix A**

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### **Acronyms**

ALJ	Administrative Law Judge
ARPR	Administrative Law Judge Pre-Hearing Review
CALJ	Chief Administrative Law Judge
DDS	Disability Determination Services
FY	Fiscal Year
HALLEX	Hearings, Appeals and Litigation Law Manual
NHC	National Hearing Center
OCALJ	Office of the Chief Administrative Law Judge
ODAR	Office of Disability Adjudication and Review
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
RTS	Ready to Schedule
SAR	Service Area Realignment
SSA	Social Security Administration
UNWK	Unassigned Workup

# **Scope and Methodology**

To accomplish our objective, we:

- Reviewed prior Office of the Inspector General reports related to processing hearing claims at hearing offices.
- Reviewed the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review's (ODAR) Hearings, Appeals and Litigation Law manual, and other relevant policies and procedures.
- Reviewed Chief Administrative Law Judge bulletins and management information reports used to identify aged claims.
- Reviewed the Agency's backlog reduction initiatives to identify those related to reducing aged claims.
- Extracted and analyzed end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 pending claims found in ODAR's Case Processing and Management System to identify the number and percent of aged claims that were over 1 and 2 years old. We then sorted the aged claims by regions and hearing offices to identify where the aged claims were located.
- Randomly selected 50 aged claims closed in FY 2007 and 50 aged claims closed in FY 2008 to identify the bottlenecks in the hearing process and learn why the claims became aged. Older claims were summarized by program type, disability, diagnosis code, and age of claimant to see whether these characteristics impacted the processing of claims.
- Interviewed five regional management teams and visited six hearing offices to identify best practices for eliminating processing bottlenecks to reduce aged claims (see Appendix C).
- Discussed our findings with ODAR staff and management.

We found the disposition data used in our review to be sufficiently reliable to meet our audit objective. The entity audited was the Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Disability Adjudication and Review. We conducted this performance audit from September 2008 through June 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

# **Hearing Office Selection Criteria**

The Social Security Administration's (SSA) Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) has 142 hearing offices throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. The hearing offices range in size from small offices (fewer than seven administrative law judges [ALJ]) to medium hearing offices (seven or eight ALJs) and large hearing offices (more than eight ALJs). All hearing offices have the same core staff and perform the same function—hold hearings and issue decisions as part of SSA's process for determining whether a person may receive benefits.

We selected six hearing offices based on a combination of factors. One factor was hearing office size (small, medium or large). Another factor was hearing office performance. We used two measures that ODAR deemed most important: (1) disposition rate (number of dispositions per day per ALJ) and (2) average processing time. Each hearing office was ranked by disposition rate and average processing time over the last 3 fiscal years (FY). Hearing offices that were in the top 20 for either the disposition rate or average processing time for 2 of the past 3 FYs were considered top performers. Hearing offices that were in the bottom 20 for either disposition rate or average processing time for 2 of the past 3 FYs were considered low performers. We also considered a wide geographic distribution to maximize national coverage.

## **HEARING OFFICES SELECTED FOR THIS REVIEW**

We selected 1 small, 1 medium, and 1 large hearing office in the top 20 performing hearing offices for either the disposition rate or average processing time (see Table C-1).

**Table C-1: Top Performing Hearing Offices**

<b>Hearing Office Name</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Hearing Office Size</b>
Charlottesville, Virginia	Region III: Philadelphia	Small
Shreveport, Louisiana	Region VI: Dallas	Medium
Albany, New York	Region II: New York	Large

**Note:** Performance level based on the number of dispositions per day per ALJ or average processing time for FYs 2006-2008.

We selected one small, one medium, and one large hearing office in the bottom 20 performing hearing offices (see Table C-2).

**Table C-2: Low Performing Hearing Offices**

Hearing Office Name	Region	Hearing Office Size
Springfield, Missouri	Region VII: Kansas City	Small
Lansing, Michigan	Region V: Chicago	Medium
Portland, Oregon	Region X: Seattle	Large

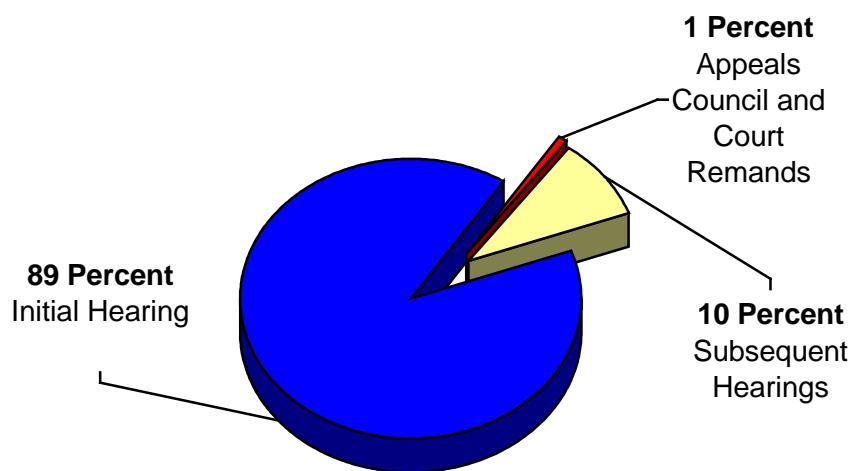
**Note:** Performance level based on the number of dispositions per day per ALJ or average processing time for FYs 2006-2008.

We also spoke to regional office management teams in five Regions: Philadelphia (Region III), Atlanta (Region IV), Chicago (Region V), Dallas (Region VI), and San Francisco (Region IX).

### **Additional Analysis on 2-Year-Old Claims**

We reviewed the pending claims at the beginning of Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 to assess the nature of the over 2-year-old aged backlog. Approximately 30,000 claims, or 4 percent, were over 2 years old. The majority of these over 2-year-old claims were initial hearing requests (see Figure D-1). Another 10 percent of the aged claims related to subsequent hearings,<sup>1</sup> with Appeals Council and court remands accounting for about 1 percent of the aged claim workload.

**Figure D-1: Claims over 2 Years Old by Hearing Type  
(As of the Beginning of Fiscal Year 2009)**



#### **Trends Related to Prior Aged Claims**

Based on our analysis of a random sample of 50 aged claims closed in FY 2007 and 50 aged claims closed in FY 2008 under the *Aged Claim* initiative, we found that claims were delayed in two hearing office processing stages before the actual hearing.<sup>2</sup> For instance, 35 percent of the claims were delayed in *ALJ Review Pre-Hearing* (ARPR)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Following the initial hearing, a second or subsequent hearing may occur for a number of reasons. ODAR records up to 16 subsequent hearings. There are no special procedures for expediting these claims as the claimant has already received a decision on the prior claim. These claims are processed in request for hearing date order.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix E for an illustration of the status placed on a claim as it progresses through the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review's (ODAR) hearing process.

<sup>3</sup> A claim is placed in ARPR status code to indicate an ALJ was reviewing the claim before the hearing to determine whether enough evidence was present to hold the hearing and determine whether expert witnesses were needed.

status with an average time of 79 days spent in the status (see Table D-1). In addition, 30 percent of the claims were in *Ready to Schedule* (RTS)<sup>4</sup> status with an average processing time of 217 days (see Table D-2).

**Table D-1: Analysis of 100 Randomly Selected Aged Claims  
– ALJ Pre-Hearing Review (ARPR) –  
(50 Processed in Each of FYs 2007 and 2008)<sup>1</sup>**

Fiscal Year	Number of Claims Reviewed	ARPR Status – Claims in Status more than 2 times ODAR's Benchmark <sup>1</sup>	Percent of Claims	Average Time Claims Spent ARPR Status
<b>FY 2007</b>	50	15	30	78 days
<b>FY 2008</b>	50	20	40	80 days
<b>Total (avg.)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>79 days</b>

**Note 1:** ODAR's benchmark is 10 days for ARPR status. OCALJ benchmark is 7 days for ARPR status.

**Table D-2: Analysis of 100 Randomly Selected Aged Claims  
– Ready to Schedule (RTS) –  
(50 Processed in Each of FYs 2007 and 2008)<sup>1</sup>**

Fiscal Year	Number of Claims Reviewed	RTS Status – Claims in Status More Than 2 times ODAR's Benchmark <sup>1</sup>	Percent of Claims	Average Time Claims Spent RTS Status
<b>FY 2007</b>	50	14	28	201 days
<b>FY 2008</b>	50	16	32	232 days
<b>Total (avg.)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>217 days</b>

**Note 1:** ODAR's benchmark is 60 days for RTS status. OCALJ has no benchmark for RTS status.

Prior OIG audits have found similar problems with claims at these points in the process.<sup>5</sup> Continued attention to the Case Processing and Management System management reports, particularly the *No Status Change* report, will be necessary to ensure the claims continue to move through the hearing process.

Even with these delays, the greatest contributor to the age of these claims was the waiting period in *Unassigned Workup* (UNWK) status before anyone in the hearing office initiated action on the case.<sup>6</sup> On average, about 54 percent of the age of the 1,000-day-old claims we reviewed related to their time in UNWK status (see Table D-3).

<sup>4</sup> A claim is placed in RTS status code when all workup, pre-development and certification activities have been completed. In our March 2007 report, *Management's Use of Workload Status Reports at Hearing Offices* (A-12-06-26130), we noted that 75 percent of pending claims were bottlenecking in ARPR status for 20 or more days, and 42 percent of pending claims were bottlenecking in RTS status for 120 or more days.

<sup>5</sup> SSA OIG, *Management's Use of Workload Status Reports at Hearing Offices* (A-12-06-26130), March 2007.

<sup>6</sup> The UNWK status code indicates a claim is “inactive” and awaiting processing.

**Table D-3: Reasons Why 12 Aged Claims Took over 1,000 Days to Process**

Disability Indicator	Days in UNWK Status	Age of Claim	Decision
Non-Disability	783	1,036	Withdrawal
Autistic Disorder	751	1,022	Favorable
Skin Disorder	737	1,031	Unfavorable
Circulatory System Disease	722	1,066	Unfavorable
Borderline Intellectual Functioning	719	1,064	Unfavorable
Osteoarthritis	704	1,050	Unfavorable
Asthma	611	1,057	Unfavorable
Chronic Pulmonary Insufficiency	530	1,026	Favorable
Valvular Heart Disease	433	1,066	Unfavorable
Back Disorder/Affective Disorder	419	1,024	Unfavorable
Non-Disability	185	1,147	Dismissal
Back Disorder	198	1,101	Unfavorable
<b>Number of Days</b>	<b>6,792</b>	<b>12,690</b>	
<b>Average Number of Days</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>1,058</b>	

We also found that the most common disability noted by claimants with claims that exceeded 1,000 days of processing time related to (1) back disorders and (2) affective disorders, as well as (3) osteoarthritis.<sup>7</sup> These three disabilities related to about 33 percent of the individuals in our sample.<sup>8</sup>

**Table D-4: Diagnosis Codes Related to 100 Aged Claims  
(Fiscal Years 2007 and 2008)**

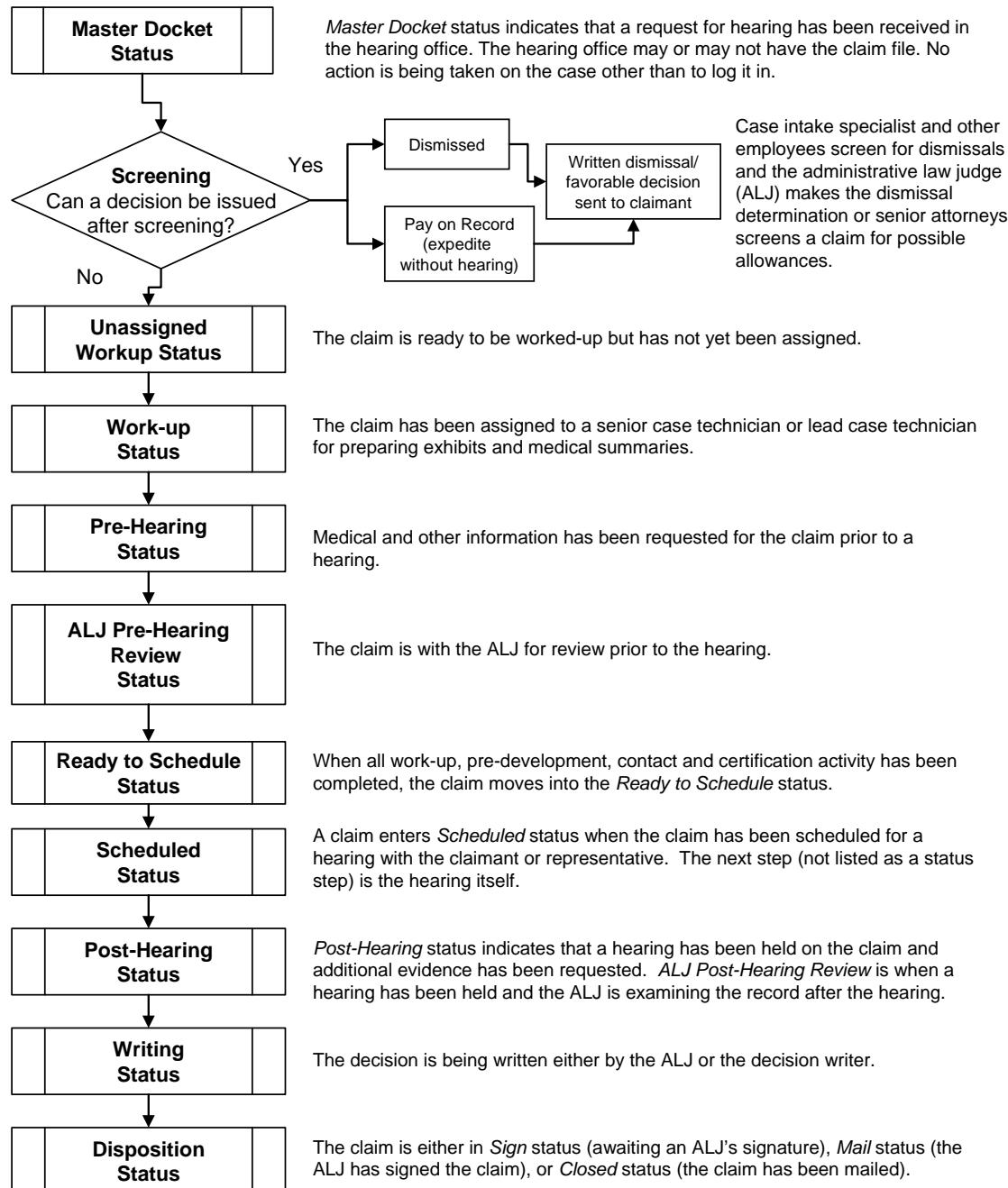
Diagnosis Codes	Number of Claims FY 2007	Number of Claims FY 2008	Total Claims
Back Disorders	9	12	21
Affective Disorders	3	3	6
Osteoarthritis	3	3	6
Diabetes Mellitus	3	1	4
Ischemic Heart Disease	0	3	3
Asthma	0	3	3
Organic Mental Disorders	1	2	3

<sup>7</sup> We only show the primary diagnosis codes that appeared three or more times.

<sup>8</sup> Not all the cases were disability related or contained a valid disability code, so the percent of cases related to these disabilities may be higher.

## Appendix E

# Hearing Office Process Flow Diagram



**Note:** The status steps are used to track claims as they move through the hearing process.

## **Appendix F**

### **Agency Comments**



## SOCIAL SECURITY

### MEMORANDUM

Date: September 8, 2009 Refer To: S1J-3

To: Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.  
Inspector General

From: Margaret J. Tittel /s/  
Acting Chief of Staff

Subject: Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Draft Report, "Aged Claims at the Hearing Level"  
(A-12-08-18071)

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report. We appreciate OIG's efforts in conducting this review. We have attached our response to the report findings and recommendations.

Please let me know if we can be of further assistance. You may direct staff inquiries to Candace Skurnik, Director, Audit Management and Liaison Staff, at (410) 965-4636.

**COMMENTS ON THE OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL (OIG) DRAFT REPORT, “AGED CLAIMS AT THE HEARING LEVEL” (A-12-08-18071)**

We appreciate the report’s acknowledgement of our efforts, including sustained leadership and focus, clear milestones, flexibility in moving workloads between offices, and the use of management information reports to successfully target and help reduce the number of aged claims. In addition, we appreciate the adoption of our recommendation to insert a chart in the report (on page 3) graphically demonstrating the dramatic reduction in aged claims since the inception of our Aged Claim initiative in fiscal year 2007.

We have several initiatives underway to reduce the overall backlog of hearings requests, which have successfully reduced aged claims. For example, we have a backlog initiative which allows us to search for cases we may process “on-the-record” without the need for a hearing. The initiatives enabled us to reduce the disability backlog eight months in a row.

Our responses to the specific recommendations are as follows:

**Recommendation 1**

Ensure sustained focus on working the oldest claims first even after the Aged Claim initiative has ended.

**Comment**

We agree. While we strive to process the oldest claims first, there are situations where we must expedite other cases due to their critical nature (e.g. terminally ill and dire need cases).

**Recommendation 2**

Instruct field office managers on the importance of providing claims folders to the hearing offices to allow for timely processing.

**Comment**

We agree. We will send out a reminder to our field offices on the importance of providing claims folders to the hearing offices timely.

**Recommendation 3**

As the National Hearing Centers (NHC) expand their workload, ensure they are integrated into agency efforts to minimize the volume of aged claims.

Comment

We agree. When possible, we will integrate the NHCs into our efforts to minimize the volume of aged claims. We designed the NHCs to work on cases from areas of the country in most need of workload assistance. The NHCs only process electronic cases and only hold video hearings, limiting the universe of claims we can integrate into the NHC.

[In addition to the information listed above, SSA also provided technical comments which have been addressed, where appropriate, in this report.]

## **Appendix G**

# OIG Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

### ***OIG Contacts***

Walter Bayer, Director, Chicago Audit Division

Nicholas Milanek, Audit Manager, Falls Church Office

### ***Acknowledgments***

In addition to those named above:

Roger Like, Auditor-in-Charge

Mary Ann Braycich, Senior Auditor

Faisal Khan, Auditor

Yaquelin Lara, Auditor

For additional copies of this report, please visit our web site at  
[www.socialsecurity.gov/oig](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/oig) or contact the Office of the Inspector General's Public Affairs Staff Assistant at (410) 965-4518. Refer to Common Identification Number A-12-08-18071.

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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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