

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

June 2010



Objective

To determine whether children in the Maryland foster care programs had the appropriate representative payees.

Background

In February 2009, we performed a computerized comparison of foster care data provided by the State of Maryland Department of Human Resources with the Social Security Administration's (SSA) beneficiary records. Based on this comparison, we identified 952 children in Maryland's foster care programs who were receiving SSA benefits managed by representative payees. We found 402 children had representative payees who were neither foster care agencies nor the children's foster care parents. We believe these children's benefits may be at risk of misuse.

To view the full report, visit
http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO_BEPDF/A-13-07-17137.pdf

Benefit Payments Managed by Representative Payees of Children in Foster care (A-13-07-17137)

Our Findings

Of the 50 children's representative payee suitability assessments conducted, SSA determined 10 representative payees possibly misused the children's benefits. We requested that SSA provide a basis for its decision to allow most of the representative payees to continue serving the children. However, as of March 2010, SSA had not provided support for its suitability decisions. Without information detailing the basis for these decisions, we cannot determine whether the Agency's assessments of the representative payees were in accordance with its policies and procedures. In addition, SSA had only reviewed 50 of the 402 children's representative payees we identified and referred to the Agency. The Agency had not yet assessed the suitability of the remaining 352 children's representative payees who were receiving benefit payments on behalf of children who were in the foster care agency's custody. Also, as of February 2010, the Agency had not assessed the suitability of the 186 representative payees who were foster care parents.

Our Recommendations

We recommended SSA:

1. Partner with the State of Maryland Department of Human Resources to increase opportunities to share information, such as using the State Verification and Exchange System to decrease instances of benefit payment misuse and non-suitable representative payees managing benefits for children in foster care.
2. Document appropriately its suitability assessments of representative payees.
3. Conduct suitability assessments for the representative payees associated with the remaining 352 children with payees who are neither the foster care agency nor the foster care parents.
4. Ensure the State of Maryland is aware that the foster care parents are serving as representative payees for the 186 children we identified.

The Agency agreed with our recommendations.