

Audit Report

Representative Payee Selections
Pending in the Representative Payee
System

OIG Office of the Inspector General
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

MEMORANDUM

Date: February 27, 2014

Refer To:

To: The Commissioner

From: Inspector General

Subject: Representative Payee Selections Pending in the Representative Payee System (A-09-12-11252)

The attached final report presents the results of our audit. Our objective was to determine whether the Social Security Administration properly resolved representative payee selections that were pending in its Representative Payee System.

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

Representative Payee Selections Pending in the Representative Payee System

A-09-12-11252



February 2014

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) properly resolved representative payee selections that were pending in its Representative Payee System (RPS).

Background

Some individuals cannot manage or direct the management of their finances because of their youth or mental and/or physical impairments. Congress granted SSA the authority to appoint representative payees to receive and manage these beneficiaries' benefit payments.

SSA employees use RPS to take and process representative payee applications. When SSA selects a representative payee and updates the Master Beneficiary and Supplemental Security Records with this information, it is compared with information in RPS. If the payee selection could not be processed or the information does not match, the representative payee selection remains in a pending status. SSA's automated system then generates an alert every 30 days to remind field office employees to take manual action to resolve the discrepancy.

SSA conducts an annual clean-up operation for representative payee selections that are pending in RPS. The cleanup is designed to move pending representative payee selections to an active or non-active status, when appropriate.

Our Findings

SSA did not always resolve representative payee selections that were pending in its RPS. Based on our random sample, we estimate that SSA:

- Did not resolve the representative payee selections for 29,092 beneficiaries. Of these, SSA paid \$132.5 million in benefits to someone other than the selected representative payees for 8,951 beneficiaries.
- Improperly changed the representative payee selections to a non-selected status for 20,141 beneficiaries. Of these, SSA paid \$265 million in benefits to someone other than the selected representative payees for 11,749 beneficiaries.
- Incorrectly recorded beneficiary information in RPS for 5,595 beneficiaries.
- Did not timely resolve the representative payee selections for 17,343 beneficiaries.

Our Recommendations

We recommend that SSA:

1. Take appropriate action to resolve the representative payee selections pending in RPS for the 98 beneficiaries identified by our audit.
2. Evaluate the results of its corrective actions for the 98 beneficiaries and determine whether it should review the remaining population of beneficiaries who have representative payee selections pending in RPS.
3. Determine whether it should modify the RPS clean-up operation to ensure it does not improperly change representative payee selections to a non-selected status.
4. Determine whether it should develop additional guidance to ensure representative payee selections are properly and timely resolved.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|---|
| BIC | Beneficiary Identification Code |
| MBR | Master Beneficiary Record |
| MRPF | Master Representative Payee File |
| OASDI | Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance |
| OIG | Office of the Inspector General |
| POMS | Program Operations Manual System |
| RPS | Representative Payee System |
| SSA | Social Security Administration |
| SSI | Supplemental Security Income |
| SSR | Supplementary Security Record |
| U.S.C. | United States Code |

OBJECTIVE

Our objective was to determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) properly resolved representative payee selections that were pending in its Representative Payee System (RPS).

BACKGROUND

SSA administers the Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) program under Title II of the *Social Security Act*.¹ This program provides monthly benefits to retired and disabled workers, including their dependents and survivors. SSA also administers the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program under Title XVI of the *Social Security Act*.² This program provides payments to financially needy individuals who are aged, blind, and/or disabled.

Some individuals cannot manage or direct the management of their finances because of their youth or mental and/or physical impairments. Congress granted SSA the authority to appoint representative payees to receive and manage these beneficiaries' benefit payments. A representative payee may be an individual or organization. SSA selects representative payees for Title II beneficiaries³ and Title XVI recipients when representative payments would serve the individual's interests.⁴

SSA employees use RPS to take and process representative payee applications.⁵ When SSA selects a representative payee and updates the Master Beneficiary (MBR) and Supplemental Security Records (SSR) with this information, it is compared with information in RPS. If the payee selection could not be processed or the information does not match, the representative payee selection remains in a pending status.⁶ RPS generates an alert to remind field office employees to take manual action to resolve the discrepancy. RPS generates these alerts every 30 days until the discrepancy is resolved.

SSA conducts an annual clean-up operation for representative payee selections that are pending in RPS. The cleanup is designed to move pending representative payee selections to an active or non-active status, when appropriate.⁷

¹ The *Social Security Act* § 201 *et seq.*, 42 U.S.C. § 401 *et seq.*

² The *Social Security Act* §§ 1602 and 1611, 42 U.S.C. §§ 1381a and 1382.

³ We use the term "beneficiary" generically in this report to refer to both OASDI beneficiaries and SSI recipients.

⁴ The *Social Security Act*, §§ 205(j)(1)(A) and 1631(a)(2)(A)(ii), 42 U.S.C. §§ 405(j)(1)(A) and 1383(a)(2)(A)(ii).

⁵ SSA, POMS, GN 00502.107 (October 4, 2010).

⁶ Referred to as "Stuck 98" cases.

⁷ SSA, Instruction MSS13-035 RPS (May 16, 2013).

For our review, we identified 111,893 Title II and XVI beneficiaries who had a representative payee selection pending in RPS as of December 2011. From this population, we selected a random sample of 200 beneficiaries for review (see Appendix A).

RESULTS OF REVIEW

SSA did not always resolve representative payee selections that were pending in its RPS. Based on our random sample, we estimate that SSA

- did not resolve the representative payee selections for 29,092 beneficiaries. Of these, SSA paid \$132.5 million in benefits paid to someone other than the selected representative payees for 8,951 beneficiaries;
- improperly changed the representative payee selections to a non-selected status⁸ for 20,141 beneficiaries. Of these, SSA paid \$265 million in benefits to someone other than the selected representative payees for 11,749 beneficiaries;
- incorrectly recorded beneficiary information in RPS for 5,595 beneficiaries; and
- did not timely resolve the representative payee selections for 17,343 beneficiaries.⁹

This occurred because SSA employees recorded incorrect beneficiary or representative payee information in RPS and did not follow up to ensure the selection was completed. In addition, we found the RPS clean-up operation did not always (1) resolve the representative payee selections or (2) correct the beneficiary or representative payee information in RPS.

We are 90-percent confident the number of beneficiaries with

- unresolved representative payee selections ranged from 23,437 to 35,352—with \$70.1 to \$194.9 million paid to someone other than the selected representative payees for 5,690 to 13,308 beneficiaries;
- representative payee selections that were improperly changed to a non-selected status ranged from 15,290 to 25,805—with \$145.3 to \$384.7 million paid to someone other than the selected representative payees for 7,998 to 16,519 beneficiaries;
- incorrect beneficiary information in RPS ranged from 3,065 and 9,321; and

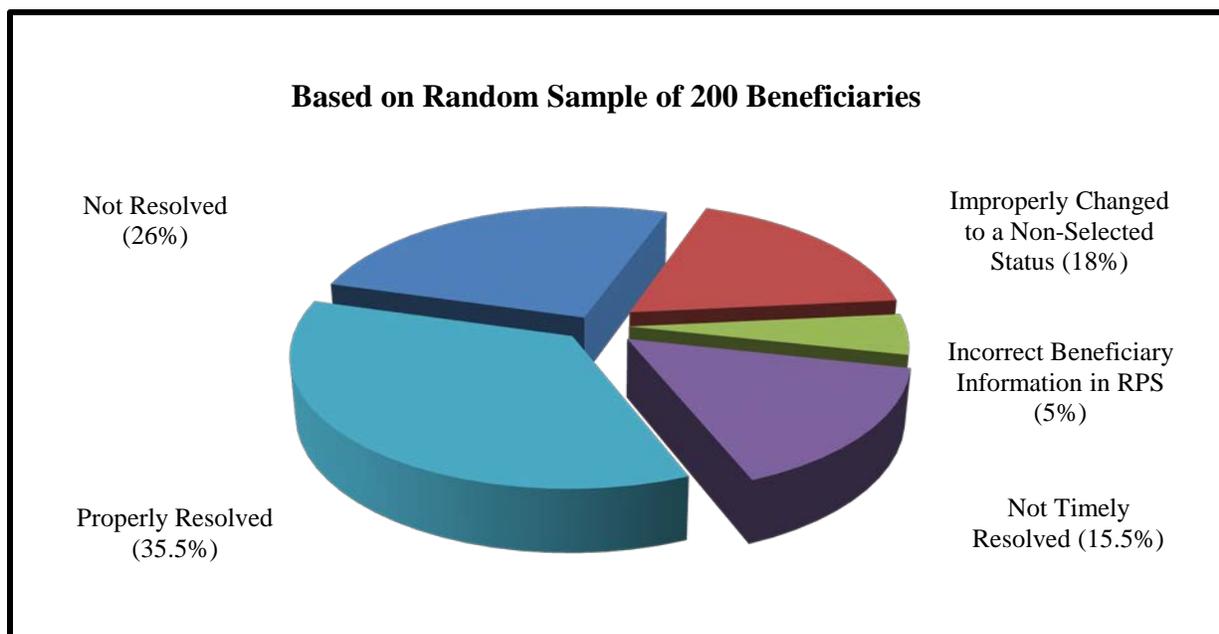
⁸ A non-selection occurs when SSA determines that an applicant will not be the representative payee for a beneficiary.

⁹ For our review, we used a standard of 90 days to determine whether SSA had resolved the representative payee selections timely.

- representative payee selections that were not timely resolved ranged from 12,812 to 22,754 (see Appendix B).

For the 200 beneficiaries in our sample, SSA (1) did not resolve the representative payee selections for 52 (26 percent), (2) improperly changed the representative payee selections to a non-selected status for 36 (18 percent), (3) recorded incorrect beneficiary information in RPS for 10 (5 percent), and (4) did not timely resolve the representative payee selections for 31 (15.5 percent). For the remaining 71 (35.5 percent) beneficiaries, SSA resolved the representative payee selections in a timely manner. The following chart summarizes the results of our review.

Figure 1: Representative Payee Selections Pending in RPS



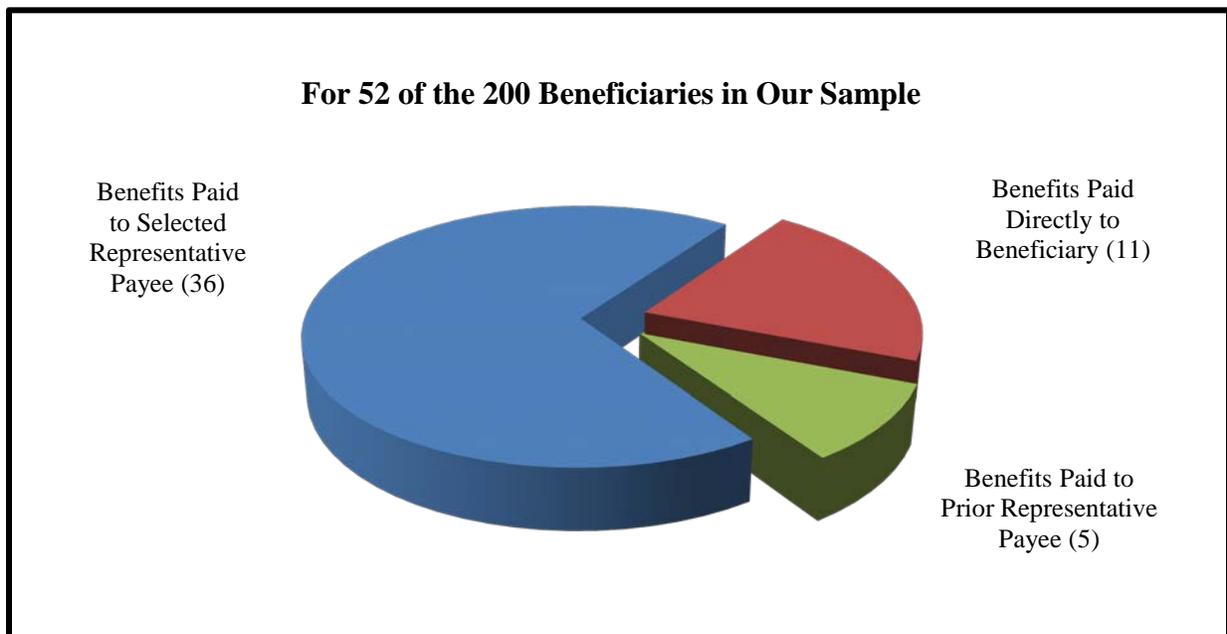
Representative Payee Selections Not Resolved

RPS contains information about current and prior representative payees for beneficiaries. RPS also updates the Master Representative Payee File (MRPF), which contains all representative payees and the beneficiaries in their care.¹⁰ SSA employees use RPS to enter and retrieve information about representative payees and those applying to be representative payees. When SSA selects a representative payee and updates the MBR and SSR with this information, it is compared with information in RPS. If the payee selection could not be processed or the information does not match, the representative payee selection remains in a pending status. RPS generates an alert to remind SSA employees to take manual action to resolve the discrepancy. RPS generates these alerts every 30 days until the discrepancy is resolved.

¹⁰ SSA, POMS, GN 00502.120 (November 21, 2005).

SSA had not resolved the representative payee selections for 52 of the 200 beneficiaries in our sample. The representative payees for these beneficiaries were pending in RPS for an average of 1,141 days.¹¹ As depicted in Figure 2, for 36 of the 52 beneficiaries, SSA paid \$337,716 in benefits to the selected representative payees. For the remaining 16 beneficiaries, SSA paid \$236,843 in benefits to someone other than the selected representative payees. Of these, SSA paid benefits directly to 11 beneficiaries and to prior representative payees for 5 beneficiaries. SSA had determined all these beneficiaries were incapable of managing their benefits. As a result, these payments were at risk of improper use or misuse because they were not paid to the representative payees whom SSA had selected to manage their benefits.

Figure 2: Representative Payee Selections Not Resolved



This occurred because SSA employees recorded incorrect beneficiary or representative payee information in RPS and did not follow up to ensure the selection was completed. Although RPS generated alerts for representative payee selections with discrepant information between RPS and the MBR or SSR, our review disclosed that SSA employees did not properly resolve these alerts.

For example, in September 2009, SSA selected a beneficiary’s daughter as representative payee. However, the representative payee selection remained in a pending status because the beneficiary information in RPS did not match the beneficiary information on the SSR. As a result, SSA continued paying the beneficiary directly. As of August 2013, SSA had paid the beneficiary \$13,486, and the selected representative payee was still in a pending status.

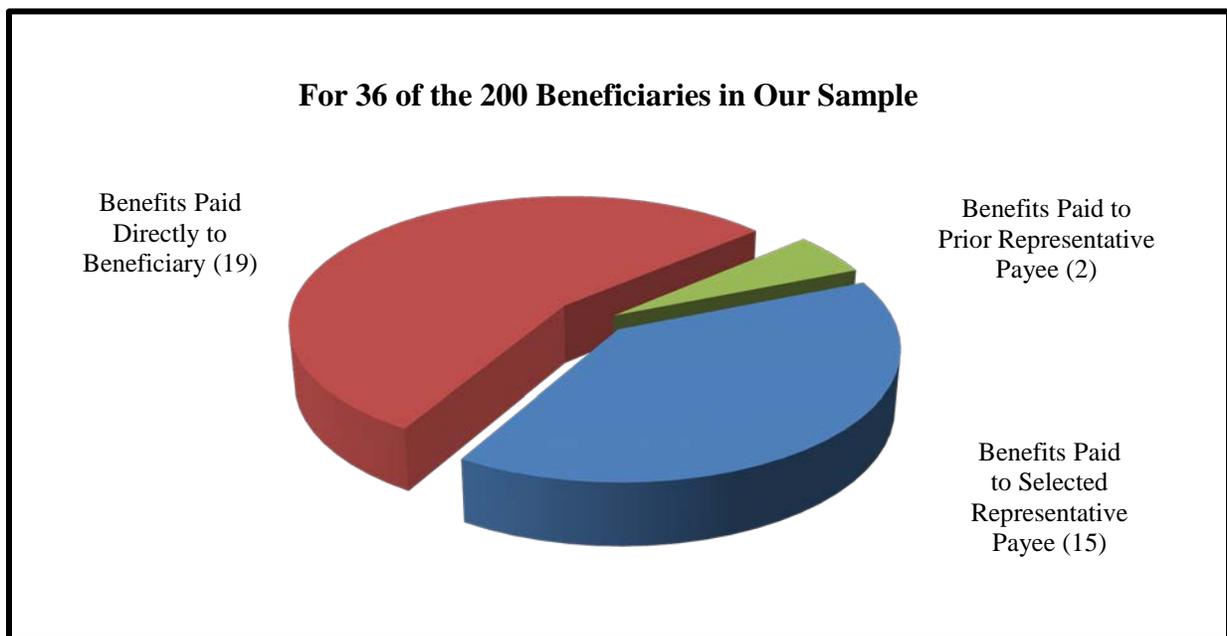
¹¹ The mean was 1,141 days. The median was 787 days.

Representative Payee Selections Improperly Changed to a Non-Selected Status

SSA conducts an annual clean-up operation¹² for representative payee selections that are pending in RPS. The cleanup is designed to move pending representative payee selections to an active or non-active status, when appropriate.¹³

The clean-up operation improperly changed the representative payee selections to a non-selected status for 36 of the 200 beneficiaries in our sample. As depicted in Figure 3, for 15 of the 36 beneficiaries, SSA paid \$194,087 in benefits to the selected representative payees. For the remaining 21 beneficiaries, SSA paid \$473,688 in benefits to someone other than the selected representative payees. Of these, SSA paid benefits directly to 19 beneficiaries and to prior representative payees for 2 beneficiaries. Since SSA had determined the beneficiaries were incapable, these payments were at risk of improper use or misuse because they were not paid to the representative payees whom SSA had selected to manage their benefits.

Figure 3: Representative Payee Selections Improperly Changed to a Non-Selected Status



¹² Referred to as “Stuck 98” clean-up maintenance runs.

¹³ SSA, Instruction MSS13-035 RPS (May 16, 2013).

For example, in January 2011, SSA selected a beneficiary's mother as representative payee. However, the representative payee selection remained in a pending status because the beneficiary information in RPS and the MBR did not match. Although SSA had determined the beneficiary was incapable of handling her finances, it continued paying the beneficiary directly. In May 2012, the clean-up operation improperly changed the mother's pending representative payee selection to a non-selected status in RPS. As of August 2013, SSA had directly paid the beneficiary \$22,513.

Incorrect Beneficiary Information Recorded in RPS

When SSA selects a representative payee for a beneficiary, it compares beneficiary information on the MBR or SSR to beneficiary information in RPS and the MRPF for consistency and accuracy. This information includes the representative payee's name, beneficiary's Social Security number, and Beneficiary Identification Code (BIC). The BIC identifies the type of beneficiary, such as wage earner, spouse, child, or widow(er). If this information does not agree, the representative payee selection remains in a pending status.

SSA recorded an incorrect BIC in RPS for 10 of the 200 beneficiaries in our sample. In addition, the RPS clean-up operation cleared the pending selection in RPS without correcting the BIC for these beneficiaries. Although SSA paid benefits to the correct representative payee, it did not update RPS to reflect the correct beneficiary's BIC.

For example, in August 2009, SSA selected a beneficiary's mother as representative payee. However, the representative payee selection remained in a pending status because an SSA employee recorded an incorrect BIC in RPS for the beneficiary. In September 2009, SSA selected the representative payee and recorded the correct BIC but did not remove the pending selection under the incorrect BIC. In May 2012, the RPS clean-up operation incorrectly cleared the representative payee selection with the incorrect BIC. As a result, RPS had duplicate information for the same beneficiary under two BICs.

Representative Payee Selections Not Timely Resolved

SSA had not timely resolved the representative payee selections for 31 of the 200 beneficiaries in our sample.¹⁴ The representative payees for these beneficiaries had been pending in RPS for an average of 586 days.¹⁵ In one instance, SSA had not resolved the representative payee selection for as long as 1,504 days. Although SSA had determined the beneficiaries needed representative payees to manage their benefit payments, it still paid the beneficiaries directly for about 1.5 years before the representative payees began receiving payments.

¹⁴ For our review, we used a standard of 90 days to determine whether SSA had resolved the representative payee selections timely.

¹⁵ The mean was 586 days. The median was 542 days.

RPS generates an alert when a representative payee selection is in a pending status and continues generating alerts every 30 days until the discrepancy is resolved. However, SSA employees did not always resolve the alerts to clear the representative payee selections in RPS. Therefore, SSA may need to develop additional policies and procedures to monitor representative payee selections. We found these selections were not timely resolved and often remained pending until SSA conducted its RPS clean-up operation. Delays in resolving the representative payee selections pending in RPS increases the likelihood that benefits may be improperly paid to someone other than the correct representative payee.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our random sample, we estimate that SSA did not resolve the representative payee selections for 29,092 beneficiaries. Of these, SSA paid about \$132.5 million to someone other than the selected representative payees for 8,951 beneficiaries. We also estimate that SSA improperly changed the representative payee selections to a non-selected status for 20,141 beneficiaries. Of these, SSA paid about \$265 million to someone other than the selected representative payees for 11,749 beneficiaries. Finally, we estimate that SSA incorrectly recorded beneficiary information in RPS for 5,595 beneficiaries and did not timely resolve the representative payee selections for 17,343 beneficiaries (see Appendix B).

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that SSA:

1. Take appropriate action to resolve the representative payee selections pending in RPS for the 98 beneficiaries identified by our audit.
2. Evaluate the results of its corrective actions for the 98 beneficiaries and determine whether it should review the remaining population of beneficiaries who have representative payee selections pending in RPS.
3. Determine whether it should modify the RPS clean-up operation to ensure it does not improperly change representative payee selections to a non-selected status.
4. Determine whether it should develop additional guidance to ensure representative payee selections are properly and timely resolved.

AGENCY COMMENTS

SSA agreed with our recommendations. The Agency's comments are included in Appendix C.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We obtained from the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Master Beneficiary (MBR) and Supplemental Security Records (SSR) and Representative Payee System (RPS), a data extract of Title II and XVI beneficiaries who had a representative payee selection pending in RPS. Using this information, we identified a population of 111,893 Title II and XVI beneficiaries in current pay status as of December 2011.

To accomplish our objective, we

- reviewed the applicable sections of the *Social Security Act*, United States Code, and SSA's Program Operations Manual System;
- interviewed SSA employees from the Offices of Operations and Systems;
- reviewed a random sample of 200 beneficiaries who had representative payee selections pending in RPS; and
- reviewed queries from SSA's MBR, SSR, RPS, Online Retrieval System, Claims Folder Records Management System, and Treasury Check Information System.
- determined the amount of payments made to someone other than the selected representative payee as of May 2013.

We determined whether the computer-processed data from the MBR and SSR were sufficiently reliable for our intended use. We tested the data to determine their completeness and accuracy. These tests allowed us to assess the reliability of the data and achieve our audit objective.

We conducted audit work in Richmond, California, and Baltimore, Maryland, between February and August 2013. The entities audited were the Offices of Operations and Systems under the Offices of the Deputy Commissioners for Operations and Systems.

We conducted this performance audit 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 objective. We believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

Appendix B – SAMPLING METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

From the Social Security Administration’s (SSA) Master Beneficiary Record, Supplemental Security Record, and Representative Payee System (RPS), we obtained a data extract of 111,893 Title II and XVI beneficiaries in current pay status who had a representative payee selection pending in RPS as of December 2011. From this population, we selected a random sample of 200 beneficiaries for review. The following tables provide the details of our sample results and statistical projections.

Table B–1: Population and Sample Size

| Description | Beneficiaries |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Population Size | 111,893 |
| Sample Size | 200 |

Representative Payee Selections Not Resolved

SSA did not resolve the representative payee selections for 52 beneficiaries. Of these, SSA paid \$337,716 to the selected representative payees for 36 beneficiaries and \$236,843 to someone other than the selected representative payees for 16 beneficiaries. Projecting our sample results to the population of 111,893 beneficiaries, we estimate that SSA did not resolve the representative payee selections for 29,092 beneficiaries. Of these, we estimate that SSA paid about \$188.9 million in benefits to the selected representative payees for 20,141 beneficiaries and \$132.5 million to someone other than the selected representative payees for 8,951 beneficiaries.

Table B–2: Representative Payee Selections Not Resolved

| Description | Beneficiaries |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| Sample Results | 52 |
| Point Estimate | 29,092 |
| Projection – Lower Limit | 23,437 |
| Projection – Upper Limit | 35,352 |

Note: All statistical projections are at the 90-percent confidence level.

Table B–3: Benefits Paid to Selected Representative Payees

| Description | Beneficiaries | Payments |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Sample Results | 36 | \$337,716 |
| Point Estimate | 20,141 | \$188,940,282 |
| Projection – Lower Limit | 15,290 | \$85,682,937 |
| Projection – Upper Limit | 25,805 | \$292,197,627 |

Note: All statistical projections are at the 90-percent confidence level.

Table B-4: Benefits Paid to Someone Other Than Selected Representative Payees

| Description | Beneficiaries | Payments |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Sample Results | 16 | \$236,843 |
| Point Estimate | 8,951 | \$132,505,369 |
| Projection – Lower Limit | 5,690 | \$70,104,165 |
| Projection – Upper Limit | 13,308 | \$194,906,573 |

Note: All statistical projections are at the 90-percent confidence level.

Representative Payee Selections Improperly Changed to a Non-Selected Status

SSA improperly changed the representative payee selections to a non-selected status for 36 beneficiaries. Of these, SSA paid \$194,087 to the selected representative payees for 15 beneficiaries and \$473,688 to someone other than the selected representative payees for 21 beneficiaries. Projecting our sample results to the population of 111,893 beneficiaries, we estimate that SSA improperly changed the representative payee selections to a non-selected status for 20,141 beneficiaries. Of these, we estimate that SSA paid about \$108.6 million to the selected representative payees for 8,392 beneficiaries and \$265 million to someone other than the selected representative payees for 11,749 beneficiaries.

Table B-5: Representative Payee Selections Improperly Changed to a Non-Selected Status

| Description | Beneficiaries |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| Sample Results | 36 |
| Point Estimate | 20,141 |
| Projection – Lower Limit | 15,290 |
| Projection – Upper Limit | 25,805 |

Note: All statistical projections are at the 90-percent confidence level.

Table B-6: Benefits Paid to Selected Representative Payees

| Description | Beneficiaries | Payments |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Sample Results | 15 | \$194,087 |
| Point Estimate | 8,392 | \$108,584,883 |
| Projection – Lower Limit | 5,239 | \$53,812,598 |
| Projection – Upper Limit | 12,655 | \$163,357,169 |

Note: All statistical projections are at the 90-percent confidence level.

Table B–7: Benefits Paid to Someone Other Than Selected Representative Payees

| Description | Beneficiaries | Payments |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Sample Results | 21 | \$473,688 |
| Point Estimate | 11,749 | \$265,011,857 |
| Projection – Lower Limit | 7,998 | \$145,322,883 |
| Projection – Upper Limit | 16,519 | \$384,700,831 |

Note: All statistical projections are at the 90-percent confidence level.

Incorrect Beneficiary Identification Code Recorded in RPS

SSA recorded the incorrect beneficiary identification code (BIC) in RPS for 10 beneficiaries. Projecting our sample results to the population of 111,893 beneficiaries, we estimate that SSA recorded the incorrect BIC in RPS for 5,595 beneficiaries.

Table B–8: Incorrect Beneficiary Identification Code Recorded In RPS

| Description | Beneficiaries |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| Sample Results | 10 |
| Point Estimate | 5,595 |
| Projection – Lower Limit | 3,065 |
| Projection – Upper Limit | 9,321 |

Note: All statistical projections are at the 90-percent confidence level.

Representative Payee Selections Not Timely Resolved

SSA did not timely resolve the representative payee selections for 31 beneficiaries. Projecting our sample results to the population of 111,893 beneficiaries, we estimate that SSA did not timely resolve the representative payee selections for 17,343 beneficiaries.

Table B–9: Representative Payee Selections Not Timely Resolved

| Description | Beneficiaries |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| Sample Results | 31 |
| Point Estimate | 17,343 |
| Projection – Lower Limit | 12,812 |
| Projection – Upper Limit | 22,754 |

Note: All statistical projections are at the 90-percent confidence level.

Appendix C – AGENCY COMMENTS



SOCIAL SECURITY

MEMORANDUM

Date: February 6, 2014 **Refer To:** S1J-3

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

From: Katherine Thornton /s/
Deputy Chief of Staff

Subject: Office of the Inspector General Draft Report, “Representative Payee Selections Pending in the Representative Payee System” (A-09-12-11252)--INFORMATION

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report. Please see our attached comments.

Please let me know if we can be of further assistance. You may direct staff inquiries to Gary S. Hatcher at (410) 965-0680.

Attachment

COMMENTS ON THE OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL (OIG) DRAFT REPORT, “REPRESENTATIVE PAYEE SELECTIONS PENDING IN THE REPRESENTATIVE PAYEE SYSTEM” (A-09-12-11252)

Recommendation 1

Take appropriate action to resolve the representative payee selections pending in RPS for the 98 beneficiaries identified by our audit.

Response

We agree. We will complete the necessary actions on the 98 cases by the end of fiscal year (FY) 2014.

Recommendation 2

Evaluate the results of its corrective actions for the 98 beneficiaries and determine whether it should review the remaining population of beneficiaries who have representative payee selections pending in RPS.

Response

We agree. By the end of calendar year (CY) 2014, we will evaluate the results of our actions on the 98 cases in recommendation 1 and determine whether additional action is required for the remaining population.

Recommendation 3

Determine whether it should modify the RPS clean-up operation to ensure it does not improperly change representative payee selections to a non-selected status.

Response

We agree. Prior to this review, we had identified an issue with the Representative Payee System (RPS) clean-up operation, and we are in the process of testing our modification. We plan to implement the modifications prior to our next RPS clean-up operation, which we estimate to take place in the spring of 2014.

Recommendation 4

Determine whether it should develop additional guidance to ensure representative payee selections are properly and timely resolved.

Response

We agree. Based on our analysis of any actions taken for the 98 cases referenced in recommendation 1, we will determine by the end of CY 2014 whether additional guidance is necessary.

Appendix D – MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS

James J. Klein, Director, San Francisco Audit Division

Jack H. Trudel, Audit Manager

Timothy E. Meinholz, Senior Auditor

Wilfred Wong, Audit Data Specialist

Charles Zaepfel, IT Specialist

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