



Report Summary

Social Security Administration
Office of the Inspector General

Social Security Administration's Suitability Program for Employees and Contractors (Limited Distribution) (A-14-99-12006)

Our objective was to determine whether the Social Security Administration's (SSA) suitability program provides reasonable assurance that all employees and contractors' employees undergo suitability reviews before they access SSA's facilities and sensitive information. Suitability refers to a person's character traits and past conduct and is distinguishable from the person's ability to fulfill the job qualification requirements, such as experience, education, and skills. Our audit disclosed weaknesses in SSA's suitability program which leaves SSA's facilities and data vulnerable to unauthorized access.

Specifically, SSA did not consistently perform initial suitability or background checks of employees, as required by Executive Order 10450, *Security Requirements for Government Employees*. SSA had not reclassified employee positions to a sensitivity level commensurate with the position's potential for adversely affecting the Agency's service or its compliance with the Computer Security Act of 1987.

We made eight recommendations to SSA to improve its suitability program to ensure access to sensitive information is appropriately limited. Our recommendations included centralization of the suitability program under a single Deputy Commissioner, development and implementation of a policy that all employees receive appropriate background checks, rewriting position descriptions with appropriate sensitivity levels, and enforcing State Disability Determination Services' (DDS) compliance with SSA's suitability program. SSA agreed with most of our recommendations. However, they did not agree to centralize the suitability program under a single Deputy Commissioner and they have not made a decision that would require State DDS personnel to undergo suitability reviews.

This report contains information that is sensitive and confidential. For security reasons, distribution of this report was limited to those with a need to know.