

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

March 2010



Objective

To determine the status of corrective actions the Social Security Administration (SSA) had taken to address recommendations in our August 2006 report, *Prisoners' Access to Social Security Numbers* (A-08-06-16082) and assess the extent to which prisoners had access to Social Security numbers (SSN).

Background

Some prisons allow inmates to work while incarcerated. While performing some of these duties, inmates may have access to other individuals' SSNs. Based on our previous audit and investigative findings, we know that unnecessary access to, and disclosure of, SSNs increases the potential for dishonest individuals to obtain and misuse these numbers, thus creating SSN integrity issues.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-08-10-11042.pdf>

Prisoners' Access to Social Security Numbers ***(A-08-10-11042)***

Our Findings

Although SSA had taken some steps to educate the correctional institutions about the potential risks associated with allowing prisoners access to SSNs, we determined that 8 (62 percent) of the 13 States identified in our August 2006 report continued this practice. While prisons generally had some controls in place to safeguard SSNs, vulnerabilities still existed. Because of identity theft concerns and the recognition that SSNs are linked to vast amounts of personal information, some States no longer allowed prisoners access to SSNs.

Matters for Consideration

Despite the risks associated with prisoners' access to SSNs, some prisons continued this practice. While we recognize SSA cannot prohibit prisons from allowing prisoners access to SSNs, we continue to believe it can help reduce potential threats to SSN integrity by encouraging States to limit SSN access. As such, we encourage SSA to contact correctional officials in the eight States that continue to allow prisoners access to SSNs. We also encourage SSA to support legislation that would prohibit executive, legislative, and judicial agencies from employing prisoners in any capacity that would allow prisoners access to SSNs of other individuals.

After reviewing the report, SSA stated it will consider possible options, such as sending letters or contacting the correctional officials in the eight States that continue to allow prisoners' access to SSNs. In addition, SSA stated it will develop a legislative proposal that would prohibit Federal, State, or local governments and private contractors from employing prisoners in any capacity that would allow access to full or partial SSNs. Once developed, the Agency will submit the proposal through the SSA and Office of Management and Budget clearance process.