

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

January 2010



Objective

To address the request of Senator George V. Voinovich regarding hearing office disposition rates. Specifically, our review focused on identifying factors that affected the performance of Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) hearing offices whose daily disposition rates fell below the national average.

Background

To address Senator Voinovich's request, we conducted interviews at hearing offices in 9 of the Social Security Administration's 10 Regions. We selected these hearing offices because they had disposition rates per day per administrative law judge (ALJ) below the national average of 2.31 for Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 through June.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-07-10-21015.pdf>

Congressional Response Report: Hearing Office Disposition Rates (A-07-10-21015)

Our Findings

At the 9 hearing offices included in our review, we interviewed a total of 14 ALJs, 9 Hearing Office Chief ALJs (HOCALJ), 9 Hearing Office Directors, 9 Senior Attorney Advisors, and 9 Senior Case Technicians. We also analyzed hearings data from ODAR's Case Processing and Management System.

Our review identified various factors that impacted hearing office productivity. Specifically, we found ALJs had control over certain factors that affected hearing office productivity—motivation and work ethic, case review time, and hearings management. Further, we identified factors related to support staff that can also affect hearing office productivity—staff quantity, quality, and composition.

We also followed up on the performance of 14 ALJs identified in a prior review as lower-producers. We found the performance of most of these ALJs had either minimally improved or not improved at all. In fact, the FY 2009 average dispositions per day for all 14 ALJs were below the national average of 2.31 dispositions per day.

We also found that the HOCALJs, who were responsible for managing ALJ performance, had taken actions to address individual ALJ factors that impact hearing office performance. These actions primarily included mentoring and counseling. However, when these actions were not successful, Agency management rarely took performance-based disciplinary action against ALJs.