

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

March 2010



Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) was dedicating adequate resources to address the pending claims backlog in the Kansas City Region and, more specifically, the State of Missouri.

Background

Senator Claire McCaskill asked us to determine whether SSA's backlog plans and ongoing initiatives were sufficient to ensure disabled Missourians received a fair share of the Agency's resources. Our review focused on the Kansas City Region and hearing offices in Missouri. The Kansas City Region has seven hearing offices, four of which are in Missouri. Each of the remaining three States in the Region has one hearing office.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-12-10-21039.pdf>

Congressional Response Report: Hearing Office Backlogs in Missouri (A-12-10-21039)

Our Findings

The pending hearings backlog in the Kansas City Regional Office and the State of Missouri is improving with the addition of resources as well as management of the backlog. The number of pending hearing claims decreased by about 17 percent, and the average age of the pending hearing claims decreased by over 12 percent. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, the Kansas City Region had the highest disposition rate in the nation, producing about 4 percent more dispositions per day per administrative law judge (ALJ) than the national average. However, while the Kansas City Region experienced a 4.5-percent decrease in average processing time of closed hearing claims, the Region's average processing time was still 40 days above the national average.

We found that various initiatives designed to reduce the pending hearings backlog have also assisted in directing resources to the Kansas City Region. The Commissioner's *ALJ Hiring* initiative, in combination with additional funding, led to improved staffing ratios and staffing mix ratios in the Region's hearing offices. Moreover, after the FY 2009 hiring, the number of ALJs in the Region's hearing offices more closely matched the percent of pending hearing claims assigned to the Region. In addition, the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review plans to build a National Hearing Center in St. Louis in FY 2010 as well as open a new hearing office in Missouri in FY 2011.

The *Service Area Realignment*, *National Hearing Center* and *Video Hearing* initiatives have helped rebalance pending claims in the heavily impacted hearing offices in the Region. Also, the *Informal Remand* initiative has helped the Region by returning older pending hearing claims to State disability determination services for updated medical records, and, in some cases, a fully favorable decision. However, hearing office space limitations and the Disability Determination Services procedures in Missouri continue to present challenges.