

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

March 2010



Objective

To determine whether address information obtained when individuals apply for replacement Social Security cards was used to resolve prior beneficiary suspensions for address or whereabouts unknown.

Background

The Social Security Administration (SSA) may suspend benefits when it receives a report that a beneficiary's whereabouts are unknown or if benefit checks have been returned undeliverable. When this occurs, the field office must attempt to locate the beneficiary. When the beneficiary is located, benefits are usually reinstated. The minimum requirements for obtaining a replacement Social Security card include the applicant's full name, date of birth, and complete address.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-09-09-29004.pdf>

Individuals Receiving Social Security Cards After Benefits Have Been Suspended (A-09-09-29004)

Our Findings

We determined that address information obtained when individuals applied for replacement Social Security cards should have been used to resolve prior beneficiary suspensions for address or whereabouts unknown. Based on a random sample of 200 beneficiaries, we found that SSA could have resolved the whereabouts of approximately 4,761 Title II beneficiaries who applied for replacement Social Security cards. As a result, about \$22.7 million in benefits remained in suspense for address or whereabouts unknown for these beneficiaries.

This occurred because SSA employees did not identify and resolve the suspended benefits when processing requests for replacement Social Security cards.

Our Recommendations

We recommended SSA:

1. Take corrective action to resolve the beneficiary suspensions and pay any benefits due the 147 beneficiaries identified by our audit.
2. Identify and take corrective action on the population of beneficiaries whose benefits were suspended because their addresses or whereabouts were unknown and who subsequently applied for a replacement Social Security card.
3. Improve controls to ensure beneficiaries who provide a correct, complete address when they apply for a replacement Social Security card are paid for any previously suspended benefits.

SSA agreed with two of our three recommendations. SSA did not agree with recommendation 2 because of its limited field office workload resources. SSA also stated that beneficiaries are responsible for reporting events that affect their entitlement to benefits.