

Payments to Individuals Confined in Special Commitment Centers

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether individuals improperly received payments while involuntarily confined in Special Commitment Centers (SCC).

Background

Federal law requires that the Social Security Administration (SSA) suspend payments to certain individuals who are in institutions as sexually dangerous persons. These provisions became effective in December 1999.

A 2012 OIG investigation identified 14 sexual predators who inappropriately received more than \$500,000 in SSA payments while confined in a Washington State SCC. The investigation identified 23 additional SCCs nationwide.

In April and May 2014, we reached out to officials at the 23 SCCs to request they provide information on the sexual predators involuntarily confined in their facilities. Officials at eight facilities provided us the names, Social Security numbers, and confinement dates of the individuals in their custody.

Conclusions

We identified 18 sexual predators who were involuntarily confined in 4 SCCs and who improperly received approximately \$524,000 in Social Security benefits and/or Supplemental Security Income payments.

Our review indicated that, after States transferred these sexual predators from prison to an SCC, the individuals contacted SSA to apply for benefits or request resumption of payments that SSA had suspended while they were incarcerated. While benefit suspension provisions continued to apply to these individuals, a mechanism had not been established to ensure SCCs reported inmate information to SSA. Consequently, SSA did not have the information it needed to prevent initiation of payments to these individuals.

We provided the names and Social Security numbers of the 18 individuals to SSA. SSA, in turn, suspended all 18 individuals' benefit payments and assessed \$523,987 in overpayments.

SSA's Office of Data Exchange staff stated that SSA will contact SCCs that do not have a memorandum of understanding with SSA and encourage them to provide information about confined individuals in exchange for potential incentive payments. Staff further stated the Office of Data Exchange will work with regional prison coordinators to contact any SCCs not reporting on individuals confined in their facilities.

Since SSA had already suspended payments to the 18 individuals and began contacting the SCCs to encourage them to provide information about individuals confined to their facilities for incentive payments, we are not making any recommendations at this time. However, we may revisit this issue in the future. The Agency reviewed the draft report and provided technical comments, which we incorporated, as appropriate.