

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

March 2012



Objective

Our objective was to address concerns that managers at the Social Security Administration (SSA) may have asked administrative law judges and staff to set aside the processing of hearing-related claims during the last week of September 2011.

Background

In an October 6, 2011 letter, House Ways and Means Committee members as well as Senator Coburn requested the Inspector General provide information on the Agency's management oversight and controls at its hearing offices in Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

To view the full report, visit <http://oig.ssa.gov/audits-and-investigations/audit-reports/A-05-12-21254>

Congressional Response Report: Oversight of the Year-end Hearings Process (A-05-12-21254)

Our Findings

SSA has a longstanding policy of not counting any Agency workload totals for a 53rd week in its year-end management information data. In our review of Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) hearing case workload statistics from September 24 through 30, 2011, also referred to as Week 53, we found workload processing decreased significantly. ODAR officials noted that they communicated the Week 53 policy to managers and attempted to address complaints and confusion from the hearing offices. Moreover, ODAR executives cited staff training and leave during Week 53 as a factor in the decrease in case processing, though we did not identify any significant levels of activity in training or leave that would explain the workload decrease. Questionnaire responses from ODAR personnel in nine States further confirmed some employees were confused about Week 53, and that some employees received instructions from managers to withhold certain types of case processing.

While it appears ODAR employees were working throughout Week 53, this work was not always being processed in the same manner nor captured in SSA's systems. SSA executives reported they will modify the process to ensure workloads are processed consistently throughout years with 53 weeks, though the Agency was still determining the specific steps related to this modification. To prevent future occurrences of workload declines during a 53rd week, we believe the Agency needs to clearly communicate a policy that explicitly states work will be processed and measured uniformly throughout all years, including those with 53 weeks.