

The Security of Systems that Provide Access to Personally Identifiable Information
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August 2016

Office of Audit Report Summary

Background

As required by the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016*, we are issuing this report on the security of the systems at the Social Security Administration (SSA) that provide access to personally identifiable information (PII).

The law requires that our report include information about SSA’s policies, procedures, and capabilities related to

1. controlling access to systems;
2. conducting software inventories;
3. monitoring and detecting exfiltration and other threats; and
4. ensuring contractors implement capabilities to monitor and detect exfiltration and other threats.

Summary

The *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016* required that we report on the following.

1. SSA has implemented controls for accessing systems, including multi-factor access controls to protect its systems that provide access to SSA’s PII data.
2. While SSA has processes to inventory systems, the Agency does not currently maintain an inventory of software licenses.
3. SSA uses data loss prevention and various forensic and visibility capabilities to identify, analyze, and remediate data exfiltration and other threats.
4. SSA has a policy to require that contractors comply with Federal security requirements for service providers and contractor operated systems. On a case-by-case basis, the Agency considers the extent to which service providers must implement capabilities to monitor and detect exfiltration and other threats.

In our Fiscal Year 2015 *Federal Information Security Modernization Act (FISMA)* audit, we identified a number of weaknesses that resulted in inappropriate and/or unauthorized access to systems. These weaknesses included programmers who had unmonitored access to system transactions as well as other users who had inappropriate access to data or other privileged functionality. We also identified control failures related to the timely removal of terminated employees’ access to Agency systems. In addition, SSA was unable to substantiate the timely removal of system access for contractors because it did not have an authoritative source to identify departure dates for individual contractors.

We are testing SSA’s efforts to remediate weaknesses over access controls and will report on the Agency’s progress in our upcoming FISMA report for Fiscal Year 2016.