



## SOCIAL SECURITY

### **MEMORANDUM**

Date: September 23, 2002

Refer To:

To: The Commissioner

From: Inspector General

Subject: Social Security Administration's Management of Congressional Inquiries  
(A-13-02-12011)

The attached final report presents the results of our evaluation. Our objective was to assess the Social Security Administration's management of congressional inquiries.

Please comment within 60 days from the date of this memorandum on corrective action taken or planned on each recommendation. If you wish to discuss the final report, please call me or have your staff contact Steven L. Schaeffer, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, at (410) 965-9700.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James G. Huse, Jr.".

James G. Huse, Jr.

Attachment

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**OFFICE OF  
THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

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**SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION**

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**SOCIAL SECURITY  
ADMINISTRATION'S  
MANAGEMENT OF  
CONGRESSIONAL  
INQUIRIES**

**September 2002**

**A-13-02-12011**

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**EVALUATION REPORT**

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## **Mission**

**We improve SSA programs and operations and protect them against fraud, waste, and abuse by conducting independent and objective audits, evaluations, and investigations. We provide timely, useful, and reliable information and advice to Administration officials, the Congress, and the public.**

## **Authority**

**The Inspector General Act created independent audit and investigative units, called the Office of Inspector General (OIG). The mission of the OIG, as spelled out in the Act, is to:**

- Conduct and supervise independent and objective audits and investigations relating to agency programs and operations.**
- Promote economy, effectiveness, and efficiency within the agency.**
- Prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse in agency programs and operations.**
- Review and make recommendations regarding existing and proposed legislation and regulations relating to agency programs and operations.**
- Keep the agency head and the Congress fully and currently informed of problems in agency programs and operations.**

**To ensure objectivity, the IG Act empowers the IG with:**

- Independence to determine what reviews to perform.**
- Access to all information necessary for the reviews.**
- Authority to publish findings and recommendations based on the reviews.**

## **Vision**

**By conducting independent and objective audits, investigations, and evaluations, we are agents of positive change striving for continuous improvement in the Social Security Administration's programs, operations, and management and in our own office.**

# *Executive Summary*

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## **OBJECTIVE**

Our objective was to assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) management of congressional inquiries.

## **BACKGROUND**

SSA receives numerous congressional inquiries that may be delivered to any one of the Agency components (regional offices, program service centers, Headquarters components, the Office of Hearings and Appeals, and field offices). Congressional inquiries address such issues as the status of disability hearings and the quality of SSA services. SSA receives inquiries by mail, electronic mail, fax, and/or telephone.

The Office of Communications (OCOMM) is responsible for the Agency's national public information/public affairs programs. As part of this responsibility, OCOMM creates, develops, facilitates, implements, oversees, and evaluates all SSA communications and public information/public affairs activities, both internally and externally. In addition, the Office of Public Inquiries, which is part of OCOMM, creates, maintains, and publishes policies and procedures for processing congressional inquiries. The Office of Public Inquiries also creates Agency-approved language, often with subject-expert component input, on issues frequently repeated in congressional inquiries and on sensitive subjects.

## **RESULTS OF REVIEW**

We determined that SSA lacked an adequate national system of internal controls related to its management of congressional inquiries. We found no Agency-wide automated system for controlling, monitoring, and tracking inquiries. SSA could not identify the total number of congressional inquiries it received; no component was designated the responsibility of managing congressional inquiries nationwide; and multiple components were not complying with Agency-wide policies and procedures when responding to congressional inquiries.

SSA advised us that it is in the process of procuring software and support services to implement a national system for controlling, monitoring and tracking correspondence. Staff stated that, in 2000, an initiative began to replace the Commissioner's Correspondence System. The use of the Commissioner's Correspondence System was limited. After reviewing several options for obtaining broader management information, Agency staff reported that, on February 15, 2002, SSA's Commissioner decided to expand this initiative to a nation-wide system.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

SSA needs to improve its system of internal controls for managing congressional inquiries. Because the Agency lacked adequate internal controls, it was not effectively and efficiently managing the congressional inquiries it received. Unless SSA improves its internal controls, inefficiencies will continue to impact the Agency's responses to Congress.

We recommend that SSA take the following corrective actions to improve its management oversight of congressional inquiries.

1. Develop and implement an Agency-wide information system that incorporates current technology to control, monitor, and track all congressional inquiries.
2. Designate a single component to oversee the Agency-wide management of congressional inquiries.
3. Develop and implement a management control process that gives reasonable assurance that Agency congressional inquiry policies and procedures are followed.

## **AGENCY COMMENTS**

SSA agreed with Recommendations 1 and 3. However, SSA disagreed with Recommendation 2. SSA stated it is better served by sharing the responsibility for overseeing the Agency-wide management of congressional inquiries. In addition, the Agency provided other comments. The text of SSA's comments is included in Appendix D.

## **OIG RESPONSE**

We reviewed the Agency's formal comments and disagree with SSA concerning Recommendation 2.

We agree that several Agency components play key roles in the management of its congressional inquiries. However, to ensure that all components follow Agency-wide procedures for responding to congressional inquiries, we continue to believe that a single component be given general oversight responsibility. Once the nationwide Assignment and Correspondence Tracking application is implemented, we will evaluate the oversight of congressional inquiries.

The Agency also provided "other" comments. We agree, in part, with these comments and have made the appropriate changes as applicable.

# Table of Contents

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	<b>Page</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>RESULTS OF REVIEW</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>SSA Lacked an Adequate System of Internal Controls</b> .....	<b>3</b>
No Automated Agency-Wide System for the Controlling, Monitoring, and Tracking Congressional Inquiries .....	<b>3</b>
SSA Could not Determine the Total Number of Congressional Inquiries it Received .....	<b>5</b>
No Designated Component for the Agency-Wide Management of Congressional Inquiries.....	<b>7</b>
Not All Components Adhered to Agency-Wide Policies and Procedures.....	<b>9</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
<b>APPENDIX A</b> – Sampling Methodology	
<b>APPENDIX B</b> – Methods Used to Control, Monitor, and Track Congressional Inquiries	
<b>APPENDIX C</b> – Congressional Inquiries That Did Not Meet Due Dates	
<b>APPENDIX D</b> – Agency Comments	
<b>APPENDIX E</b> – OIG Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments	

## *Acronyms*

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AIMS	Administrative Instructions Manual System
CMM	Correspondence Management Manual
FY	Fiscal Year
OCOMM	Office of Communications
OSCAR	Optical System for Correspondence Analysis and Response
OPI	Office of Public Inquiries
POMS	Program Operations Manual System
SSA	Social Security Administration

## OBJECTIVE

Our objective was to assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) management of congressional inquiries.

## BACKGROUND

SSA receives numerous congressional inquiries that may be delivered to any one of the Agency components (regional offices, program service centers, Headquarters components, the Office of Hearings and Appeals, and field offices). Congressional inquiries address such issues as the status of disability hearings and the quality of SSA services. SSA receives inquiries by mail, electronic mail, fax, and/or telephone.

The Office of Communications (OCOMM) is responsible for the Agency's national public information/public affairs programs. As part of this responsibility, OCOMM creates, develops, facilitates, implements, oversees, and evaluates all SSA communications and public information/public affairs activities, both internally and externally. In addition, the Office of Public Inquiries (OPI), which is part of OCOMM, creates, maintains, and publishes policies and procedures for processing congressional inquiries.<sup>1</sup> OPI also creates Agency-approved language, often with subject-expert component input, on issues frequently repeated in congressional inquiries and on sensitive subjects.

## SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

To accomplish our objective, we:

- Interviewed SSA personnel to obtain an understanding of the policies and procedures followed in responding to congressional inquiries.
- Reviewed the *Program Operations Manual System (POMS)*<sup>2</sup> and *Administrative Instructions Manual System (AIMS)*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>These policies are published in SSA's *AIMS; Correspondence Management Manual (CMM)*, Chapter 1, *Administrative Management Communications*, Instruction No. 03 *Processing Congressional and Other High Priority Correspondence*; and in *POMS*, section DG 20017.001, *SSA High Priority Correspondence*.

<sup>2</sup> *POMS*, sections DG 20017.000 through DG 20017.006.

<sup>3</sup> *AIMS*, *CMM*, Chapter 01, Instructions No. 03.



- Obtained from OPI's Optical System for Correspondence Analysis and Response (OSCAR) system a list of 9,166 congressional inquiries and 308 special interest inquiries for the period October 1999 through June 2001. We randomly selected 200 congressional inquiries and 30 special interest inquiries for review (see Appendix A for Sampling Methodology). To test the reliability of OSCAR's automated data, we compared selected data elements with the original congressional inquiries. The test results indicated OSCAR's automated data accurately reflected information contained in these inquiries.
- Contacted regional offices, program service centers, Headquarters components, and the Office of Hearings and Appeals to obtain information to identify the total number of congressional inquiries received in Fiscal Year (FY) 2001 and the methods used to control, monitor, and track congressional inquiries.

We did not assess the accuracy or quality of the Agency responses to congressional inquiries.

The entity reviewed was OPI within OCOMM. Although we obtained information from various components, we performed an in-depth review and analysis of data received from OPI. We performed our review from August 2001 through January 2002 in accordance with the *Quality Standards for Inspections* issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

# Results of Review

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We determined that SSA lacked an adequate national system of internal controls related to its management of congressional inquiries. We found no Agency-wide automated system for controlling, monitoring, and tracking inquiries. SSA could not identify the total number of congressional inquiries it received; no component was designated the responsibility of managing congressional inquiries; and multiple components were not complying with Agency-wide policies and procedures when responding to congressional inquiries.

SSA advised us that it is in the process of procuring software and support services to implement a national system for controlling, monitoring and tracking correspondence. Staff stated that, in 2000, an initiative began to replace the Commissioner's Correspondence System. The use of the Commissioner's Correspondence System was limited. After reviewing several options for obtaining broader management information, Agency staff reported that, on February 15, 2002, SSA's Commissioner decided to expand this initiative to a nation-wide system.

## **SSA Lacked an Adequate System of Internal Controls**

Office of Management and Budget Circular A-123, *Management Accountability and Control Standards*, states agencies must take systematic and proactive measures to assess the adequacy of management controls in Federal programs and operations. The Circular also states management needs to implement processes for planning, organizing, directing, and controlling program operations. Management accountability is the expectation that managers are responsible for the quality and timeliness of program performance and assuring that programs are managed with integrity and in compliance with applicable law. Additionally, information management is an issue of continuing importance to all Federal agencies.

Office of Management and Budget Circular A-130, *Management of Federal Information Resources*, states information technology "can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of program delivery." Further, it encourages Federal agencies to "seek opportunities to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of government programs through the judicious application of information technology."

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### **No Automated Agency-Wide System for Controlling, Monitoring, and Tracking Congressional Inquiries**

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computer tracking application software.

SSA's management of congressional inquiries is decentralized within the Agency. Each SSA component is responsible for managing its own activities related to congressional inquiries. These components use several methods to control, monitor, and track the congressional inquiries it receives. For example, they use paper records, computerized data bases and spreadsheets, and

**Existing Technology Was Not Used to Control, Monitor, and Track Congressional Inquiries.** SSA did not fully use existing information technology to manage its congressional inquiry workload. We found some Headquarters components and the Office of Hearings and Appeals in Falls Church used OSCAR. Senior management stated that efforts were underway to expand the use of OSCAR to regional offices, program service centers, and other SSA Headquarters components. However, the expansion efforts were stopped because of the Agency's efforts to procure software and support services to implement a national system to control, monitor and track correspondence.

Additionally, we found regional offices, program service centers, and other SSA Headquarters components used separate and unique systems or methods to control, monitor, and track their congressional inquiry workload (see Appendix B). These systems do not communicate with each other. Moreover, regional office senior management advised us that field offices did not track their congressional inquiry workloads.

**Congressional Inquiries Not Monitored and Tracked Through Completion.** We reviewed 200 congressional inquiries from 1 SSA Headquarters component to determine whether the inquiries were controlled, monitored, and tracked through completion. We found that all 200 congressional inquiries were controlled. However, of those 200 congressional inquiries, 99 were referred to offices outside of this component. Of those 99 congressional inquiries referred, 69 were not monitored and tracked through completion. This component limited its monitoring and tracking to congressional inquiries it received and completed or were completed by another SSA Headquarters component. During our evaluation, management stated that a lack of resources prohibited them from monitoring and tracking inquiries referred to other non-SSA Headquarters' components.

**Congressional Inquiries with Inaccurate Due Dates.** Additionally, we reviewed the OSCAR system used by two SSA components for controlling, monitoring, and tracking congressional inquiries to determine whether system-generated due dates for congressional inquiries were accurate. Of 200 congressional inquiries, 145 had inappropriate days<sup>4</sup> included when due dates were established, and 61 had due dates on inappropriate days. For example, two congressional inquiries had due dates on December 25, 2001. Projecting the results of our sample items to the population of 9,166 congressional inquiries, we estimate the OSCAR system did not exclude inappropriate days when establishing due dates for approximately 6,691 (73 percent) congressional inquiries and had inappropriate days as due dates for approximately 2,796 (31 percent) congressional inquiries. Senior management within this component stated the system was experiencing problems recognizing appropriate calendar days, and staff failed to update the OSCAR system with the holiday file, which would have told the system the holidays to exclude.

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<sup>4</sup> Inappropriate days are Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.

With no centralized system to comprehensively control, monitor, and track congressional inquiries, the Agency cannot accurately determine the volume, frequency, and status of its congressional inquiries workload and whether those inquiries are being processed in a timely manner to meet established due dates.

On December 5, 2001 and February 27, 2002, we briefed SSA senior staff about the results of our evaluation. We discussed the Agency's lack of a centralized system to comprehensively control, monitor, and track congressional inquiries.

After these discussions, SSA senior staff advised us of the Agency's efforts to procure software and support services for implementing a national system to control, monitor and track correspondence. Upon arrival at SSA, the Commissioner found there was a lack of national management information concerning the Agency's correspondence. In 2000, an initiative began to replace the Commissioner's Correspondence System. However, the use of the Commissioner's Correspondence System was limited. After reviewing several options for obtaining broader management information, SSA's Commissioner decided on February 15, 2002, to expand this initiative. This decision expanded the scope of the replacement project for the Commissioner's Correspondence System to include all SSA components.

The Agency issued a formal "request for information"<sup>5</sup> to procure a comprehensive, automated correspondence control system. The Agency intends to use this system to assign work, process work electronically, track the status of assignments, and provide management information reports relating to correspondence support. Since the system is not operational, we cannot assess the effectiveness of the system at this time.

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***SSA Could Not Determine the Total Number of Congressional Inquiries it Received***

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SSA lacked the management controls to identify the number of congressional inquiries it received. During our review, we requested from OCOMM and OPI the total number of congressional inquiries the Agency received in FY 2001. Neither office was able to provide the requested information since OCOMM and OPI are only responsible for tracking the congressional inquiries they receive.

We tried to independently determine the total number of congressional inquiries SSA received in FY 2001. Based on the data reported by various Agency components, we estimate that SSA received approximately 80,000<sup>6</sup> congressional inquiries in FY 2001. Regional offices and program service centers reported receiving over 55,000 congressional inquiries in FY 2001. Three Headquarters components<sup>7</sup> reported receiving 18,556 congressional inquiries. In addition, the Office of Hearings and

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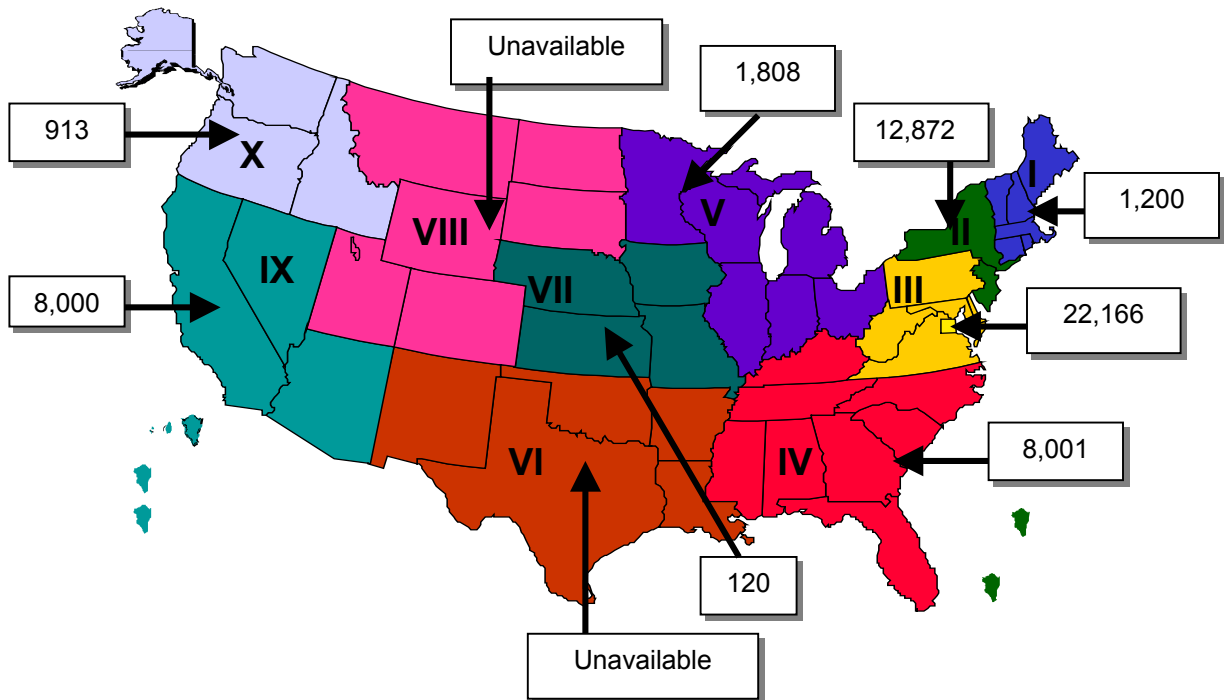
<sup>5</sup> Request for Information number SSA-RFI-02-0948, *Commissioner's Correspondence Control System*, May 1, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Information on the number of congressional inquiries received in FY 2001 was reported by SSA components; we did not independently validate the accuracy of this information.

<sup>7</sup> The Offices of the Commissioner, Congressional and Legislative Affairs, and Communications.

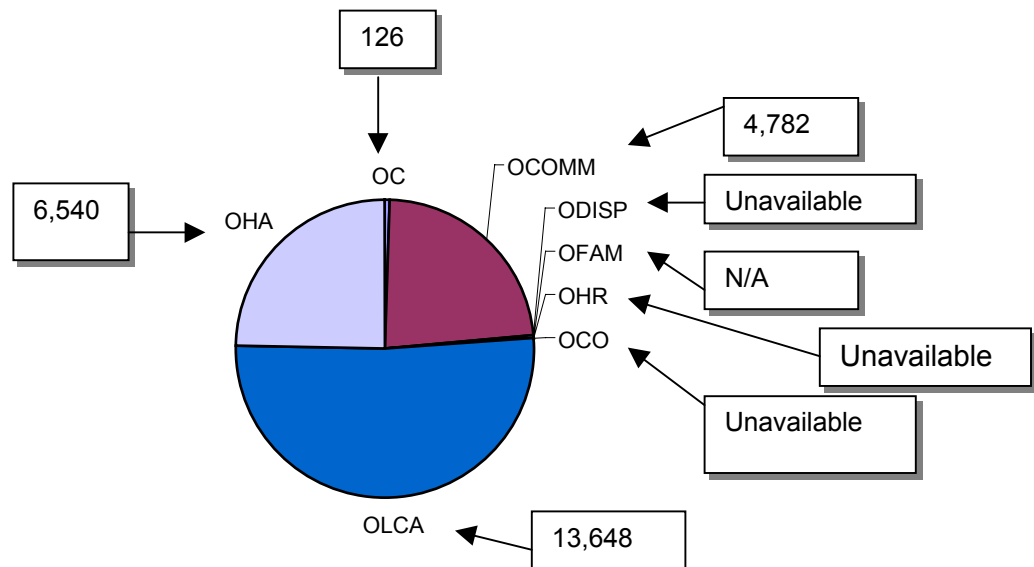
Appeals reported receiving 6,540 congressional inquiries. Although field offices receive congressional inquiries, we were unable to obtain data regarding the number of congressional inquiries they received in FY 2001. Because there was no management oversight, the Agency was not able to accurately determine the volume of its congressional inquiries workload and whether those inquiries were being processed to meet established due dates. Figures 1 and 2 show the reported number of congressional inquiries received by SSA components.

**Figure 1. FY 2001 Congressional Inquiries Received by SSA Regional Offices and Program Service Centers**



\*These figures were estimates based on information provided by SSA personnel for regional offices and program service centers.

**Figure 2. FY 2001 Congressional Inquiries Received at SSA Headquarters**



\*SSA components represented are the Offices of the Commissioner; Communications; Disability Income and Security Programs; Finance, Assessment and Management; Human Resources; Central Operations; Legislative and Congressional Affairs; and Hearings and Appeals.

**No Designated Component for the Agency-Wide Management of Congressional Inquiries**

Within SSA, OCOMM is responsible for the Agency’s national public information/public affairs programs. OPI, which is located within OCOMM, is responsible for developing Agency-wide policies, procedures, and approved language for responding to congressional inquiries. OPI management stated that, in the early to mid-1980’s, their office manually tracked the number of congressional inquiries received in the regional offices (not field offices), program service centers, and Headquarters components. Additionally, OPI reports it performed a quality appraisal of responses to congressionals and monitored and tracked regional offices’ activities related to congressional inquiries. However, we found no component specifically designated the responsibility of managing congressional inquiries Agency-wide.

Without a designated component responsible for managing congressional inquiries, SSA cannot effectively and efficiently manage its congressional inquiry workload. For example, SSA cannot determine whether referrals to other components within SSA are being made timely. We reviewed 200 congressional inquiries from 1 SSA Headquarters’ component. Of these, 99 inquiries were referred to another Agency component for additional information or completion of a response. Congressional

inquiries within this component were being held for an average of 9 workdays<sup>8</sup> before referrals were initiated. A congressional inquiry was received on March 2, 2000 but was not referred to another Agency component until April 18, 2000. OPI management advises that many referrals are made within 24 hours of receipt, but others might not be referred until background on a particular case is developed and a referral is necessary.

SSA senior management further stated the delay in referring some congressional inquiries from this component may be completely appropriate because of a “lengthy development” process that led to the referral. Additionally, a referral may contain significant information that may serve as a final response to one issue; however, a dual issue may exist that requires another component’s input before the Agency’s final response is completed. These delays have not been independently verified.

Moreover, SSA management stated that, from April 1, 2002 through June 30, 2002, this component held congressional inquiries an average of about 6 workdays before referrals were initiated. The average of about 6 workdays has not been independently verified.

Table 1 shows the actual length of time the 99 congressional inquiries were held within the Headquarters component before referrals were made to other Agency components. Fifty-two percent of the congressional inquiries were held more than 5 working days before referrals were initiated. Senior management stated that the constant workload sometimes interferes with the movement of referrals.

**Table 1. Sampled Congressional Inquiries Referred from October 1999 through June 2001**

<i><b>Days Congressional Inquiries Were Held Before Referral Was Initiated</b></i>	<i><b>Total Number Congressional Inquiries</b></i>	<i><b>Percent of Total</b></i>
<b>1 Day</b>	9	9.1
<b>2 to 5 Days</b>	39	39.4
<b>6 to 10 Days</b>	17	17.2
<b>11 to 20 Days</b>	20	20.2
<b>21 Days or More</b>	14	14.1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>8</sup> We used the day after receipt of the congressional inquiry and the date the inquiry was referred to another SSA component to determine the total numbers of days held within a given component (excluding weekends and holidays).



Additionally, SSA could not determine whether interim information,<sup>9</sup> when required, was provided in a timely manner. *AIMS, CMM, Chapter 01, Instruction No. 03*, states that, if final information is unavailable when due, interim information must be made. The SSA Headquarters component we reviewed did not always provide interim responses when established due dates would not be met. Our analysis showed that, of 200 congressional inquiries reviewed, 41 did not meet the established due date, and no interim information was provided to the requestor (see Appendix C).

When an office does not provide the interim response, the requestor does not know the status of their inquiry. Senior management for the Headquarters component stated they depend on personnel in other components to locate records, provide assistance, and/or information related to the congressional inquiry before interim information can be provided to the congressional requestor.

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***Not All Components  
Adhered to Agency-wide  
Policies and Procedures***

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We found that several SSA components did not adhere to Agency-wide policies and procedures when responding to congressional inquiries. Four regional offices, a program service center, and the Office of Hearings and Appeals reported that they did not adhere to Agency-wide policies or procedures when responding to congressional inquiries. Specifically, these components did not use the appropriate *POMS*<sup>10</sup> or *AIMS*<sup>11</sup> when receiving, controlling, and responding to congressional inquiries.

Generally, these SSA components used either no criteria or other guidelines for responding to congressional inquiries. For example, one component used orally communicated policy created within the office as criteria for responding to congressional inquiries. By not adhering to Agency policies and procedures for responding to congressional inquiries, components may be responding to inquiries in an unacceptable manner. Also, SSA cannot ensure the consistency and quality of responses it provides to congressional requestors.

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<sup>9</sup> Interim information is provided to keep the inquirer advised of the status of the inquiry when final information is not readily available.

<sup>10</sup> *POMS*, Sections DG 20017.000 through DG 20017.006.

<sup>11</sup> *AIMS*, CMM, Chapter 01, Instruction No. 03.



# Conclusions and Recommendations

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SSA needs to improve its system of internal controls for managing congressional inquiries. Because the Agency lacked adequate internal controls, it was not effectively and efficiently managing the congressional inquiries it received. Unless SSA improves its internal controls, inefficiencies will continue to impact the Agency's responses to Congress.

We recommend that SSA take the following corrective actions to improve the management of its congressional inquiries.

1. Develop and implement an Agency-wide information system that incorporates current technology to control, monitor, and track all congressional inquiries.
2. Designate a single component to oversee the Agency-wide management of congressional inquiries.
3. Develop and implement a management control process that gives reasonable assurance that Agency congressional inquiry policies and procedures are followed.

## AGENCY COMMENTS

SSA agreed with Recommendations 1 and 3. However, SSA disagreed with Recommendation 2. SSA stated it is better served by sharing the responsibility for overseeing the Agency-wide management of congressional inquiries. In addition, the Agency provided other comments. The text of SSA's comments is included in Appendix D.

## OIG RESPONSE

We reviewed the Agency's formal comments and disagree with SSA concerning Recommendation 2. The Agency also provided "other" comments. We agree, in part, with these comments and have made the appropriate changes as applicable.

We believe the Agency's management of its congressional inquiries presents an opportunity for several components to play key roles. However, there should be a single component designated to oversee the Agency-wide management of congressional inquiries. As discussed in our report, the Agency lacks an adequate national system of internal controls related to its management of congressional inquiries. For example, we found that several SSA components did not adhere to Agency-wide policies and procedures when responding to congressional inquiries. Once the nationwide Assignment and Correspondence Tracking application is implemented, we may reassess the oversight of congressional inquiries.

# *Appendices*

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## **Sampling Methodology**

We obtained from the Social Security Administration’s Office of Public Inquiries’ Optical System for Correspondence Analysis and Response system a list of 9,166 congressional inquiries and 308 special interest inquiries for the period October 1999 through June 2001. We used a random sample generator to select congressional inquiries for review. We selected and reviewed 200 of the 9,166 congressional inquiries and 30 of the 308 special interest inquiries for this period.

We reviewed each selected congressional inquiry to determine whether congressional inquiries were completed in a timely and efficient manner. Specifically, we determined whether

- congressional inquiries were controlled, monitored, and tracked through completion;
- congressional inquiries were referred and the number of congressional inquiries referred; and
- due dates for congressional inquiries were accurate and whether due dates were being met.

<b>Sample Results and Projections</b>	
Population size	9,166
Sample size	200
<b>Attribute Projections</b>	
Sampled cases with Inappropriate Days <sup>1</sup> Included When Establishing Due Dates	146
Projection of cases with Inappropriate Days Included When Establishing Due Dates	6,691
Projection lower limit	6,178
Projection upper limit	7,157
Sampled cases with Inappropriate Days as Due Dates	61
Projection of cases with Inappropriate Days as Due Dates	2,796
Projection lower limit	2,309
Projection upper limit	3,322

Note: All projections were calculated at the 90-percent confidence level.

<sup>1</sup> Inappropriate days are Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.

## Methods Used to Control, Monitor, and Track Congressional Inquiries

We found that regional offices, program service centers, the Social Security Administration Headquarters components, and the Office of Hearings and Appeals used separate and unique systems or methods to control, monitor, and track their congressional inquiry workload. This chart shows the different systems or methods used.

<i>SSA Components</i>	<i>Computer System</i>	<i>Electronic Log</i>	<i>Microsoft Outlook</i>	<i>Spreadsheet</i>	<i>Database</i>	<i>Manual Log</i>	<i>None</i>
<b>Headquarters Components</b>							
Office of the Commissioner	X						
Office of Communications	X						
Office of Disability and Income Security Programs	X						
Office of Human Resources	X						
Office of Central Operations			X				
Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs		X					
Office of Hearings and Appeals	X				X		
<b>Regional Offices</b>							
Region I							X
Region II					X		
Region III				X			
Region IV				X			
Region V	X						
Region VI	X						
Region VII					X		
Region VIII	X						
Region IX		X					
Region X					X		
<b>Program Service Centers</b>							
Great Lakes	X						
Mid-America					X		
Mid-Atlantic						X	
North Eastern					X		
South Eastern				X			
Western		X					

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## **Congressional Inquiries That Did Not Meet Due Dates**

Our analysis showed that interim information, as required, was not always provided to congressional requestor when established due dates were not going to be met. This chart shows the 41 congressional inquiries that did not meet the established due date, and no interim information was provided to the requestor.

	<b>Control Number</b>	<b>Receipt Date</b>	<b>OSCAR Due Date</b>	<b>Response Date</b>
1	OB3706	10/12/99	11/7/99	12/14/99
2	OB4996	10/21/99	11/13/99	12/7/99
3	OB6238	10/26/99	11/19/99	11/29/99
4	OC3618	11/17/99	12/20/99	1/19/00
5	OC5978	12/3/99	12/28/99	3/6/00
6	OC8056	12/14/99	1/30/00	2/1/00
7	OD2584	1/6/00	1/24/00	3/9/00
8	OD2615	1/4/00	1/31/00	2/3/00
9	OD2670	1/7/00	1/30/00	2/8/00
10	OD7764	1/27/00	2/20/00	3/9/00
11	OD7769	1/27/00	2/20/00	3/14/00
12	OE7512	3/1/00	3/19/00	4/10/00
13	OE7719	3/6/00	3/24/00	4/27/00
14	OE7730	3/6/00	3/24/00	4/27/00
15	OE8533	2/25/00	3/14/00	4/10/00
16	OE9796	3/13/00	3/31/00	4/4/00
17	OF3504	4/10/00	4/28/00	5/5/00
18	OF9336	4/4/00	4/22/00	5/4/00
19	OG8501	6/13/00	7/1/00	7/11/00
20	OH3824	7/3/00	7/20/00	7/21/00
21	OH7119	7/21/00	8/12/00	8/16/00
22	OH9096	7/25/00	8/12/00	8/14/00
23	OJ2156	9/19/00	10/7/00	1/19/01
24	OJ7193	10/5/00	10/23/00	10/25/00
25	OL7247	1/19/01	2/6/01	2/26/01
26	OM0277	2/9/01	2/27/01	3/20/01
27	OM1311	2/14/01	3/05/01	3/6/01
28	OM4101	3/13/01	3/31/01	4/9/01
29	OM4128	3/15/01	4/2/01	4/12/01
30	OM4210	3/13/01	3/31/01	5/21/01

	<b>Control Number</b>	<b>Receipt Date</b>	<b>OSCAR Due Date</b>	<b>Response Date</b>
31	OM4260	3/14/01	4/1/01	4/10/01
32	OM4616	3/14/01	4/1/01	4/10/01
33	OM6476	3/14/01	4/1/01	4/19/01
34	OM6483	3/14/01	4/1/01	4/19/01
35	OM6511	3/2/01	3/20/01	5/8/01
36	OM6717	4/3/01	4/25/01	5/22/01
37	OM8256	4/17/01	5/5/01	5/14/01
38	OM9395	4/24/01	5/12/01	5/15/01
39	ON0254	5/1/01	5/19/01	5/21/01
40	ON3054	5/11/01	5/29/01	6/6/01
41	ON4830	6/12/01	7/9/01	7/16/01

## Agency Comments



## SOCIAL SECURITY

MEMORANDUM

31227-24-807

Date: September 9, 2002

Refer To: S1J-3

To: James G. Huse, Jr.  
Inspector General

From: Larry W. Dye /s/  
Chief of Staff

Subject: Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Draft Evaluation Report, "Social Security Administration's Management of Congressional Inquiries" (A-13-02-12011)—  
INFORMATION

We appreciate OIG's efforts in conducting this review. Our comments on the report content and recommendations are attached. Staff questions can be referred to Odessa J. Woods on extension 50378.

Attachment:  
Proposed Comments



**COMMENTS OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (SSA) ON THE OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL (OIG) DRAFT EVALUATION REPORT, "SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION'S MANAGEMENT OF CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRIES" (A-13-02-12001)**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

In the spring of 2000, the Office of the Commissioner began efforts to replace the Commissioner's Correspondence System (CCS) with more current technology, which would enhance the Agency's ability to track correspondence processing as well as to facilitate document management. Companies with products in this area were asked to submit information on systems and approaches to meet this need. After extensive research, it was determined that a commercial document management and workflow application, supplemented to address agency-specific functions, would best address the requirements. Procurement efforts began in the spring of 2001. Recognizing the potential for broad use of the solution, the solicitation was structured to provide the Agency with the flexibility to build an infrastructure that would allow for enterprise-wide expansion to meet current or future requirements.

**Recommendation 1**

Develop and implement an Agency-wide information system that incorporates current technology to control, monitor, and track all congressional inquiries.

**SSA Comment**

We agree. We are pleased to note that on August 13, 2002, the Agency awarded two Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPA) to facilitate this activity. The first is for software licenses and maintenance for the Open Text Livelink product and related modules. This commercial document management and workflow software product will form the core of our nationwide Assignment and Correspondence Tracking (ACT) application. The second BPA was awarded for the services and support required to design, develop and implement ACT. Orders have been placed against both BPAs and work has begun.

ACT will be used to replace the current CCS being used for correspondence addressed to the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, and for related assignments. In addition, the application will be implemented by all SSA organizations to track high-profile correspondence, which includes congressional inquiries. The ACT system will track entries by type, sender and addressee, subject matter, due dates, etc. This is expected to enable the Agency to monitor responsiveness to congressional inquiries nationwide, as well as to ensure the consistency of responses by making similar inquiries and responses available for review. Trends in subject matter areas will be monitored to further support agency initiatives and to identify policy issues and concerns in a timely manner.

## **Recommendation 2**

Designate a single component to oversee the Agency wide management of congressional inquiries.

### **SSA Comment**

We disagree. While the responsibility for overseeing the Agency-wide management of congressional inquiries could be given solely to one component, we have determined that the Agency is better served with a shared responsibility approach. All agency components play key roles in responding to congressional inquiries. Each Deputy Commissioner has a strong interest in ensuring that prompt and accurate information is provided. The Office of the Commissioner's Executive Operations staff has responsibility for all correspondence from the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner. The Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs is the primary Agency point of contact for Congress. The Office of Communications handles most of the congressional correspondence coming into headquarters and has responsibility for certain policies and procedures related to its handling. As the new system is developed, it will facilitate activities to manage the workloads contained in it. Decisions regarding the specific roles and responsibilities will be made as these functions are more fully identified and developed.

## **Recommendation 3**

Develop and implement a management control process that gives reasonable assurance that Agency congressional inquiry policies and procedures are followed.

### **SSA Comment**

We agree. The ability of ACT to provide nationwide information will be crucial to ensuring that policy and procedures are being followed. We have taken advantage of the opportunity provided by this project to revise, update and synchronize our policies and procedures. In addition, the training that will be conducted on ACT nationwide will be preceded by an Interactive Video Training session on the agency policies and procedures. This policy training will establish a consistent understanding of our agency policies throughout all organizations. The ACT functionality will assist in the implementation of these policies and procedures.

## **OIG Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments**

### ***OIG Contacts***

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### ***Acknowledgments***

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# **Overview of the Office of the Inspector General**

## **Office of Audit**

The Office of Audit (OA) conducts comprehensive financial and performance audits of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) programs and makes recommendations to ensure that program objectives are achieved effectively and efficiently. Financial audits, required by the Chief Financial Officers' Act of 1990, assess whether SSA's financial statements fairly present the Agency's financial position, results of operations and cash flow. Performance audits review the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of SSA's programs. OA also conducts short-term management and program evaluations focused on issues of concern to SSA, Congress and the general public. Evaluations often focus on identifying and recommending ways to prevent and minimize program fraud and inefficiency, rather than detecting problems after they occur.

## **Office of Executive Operations**

OEO supports the OIG by providing information resource management; systems security; and the coordination of budget, procurement, telecommunications, facilities and equipment, and human resources. In addition, this office is the focal point for the OIG's strategic planning function and the development and implementation of performance measures required by the *Government Performance and Results Act*. OEO is also responsible for performing internal reviews to ensure that OIG offices nationwide hold themselves to the same rigorous standards that we expect from SSA, as well as conducting investigations of OIG employees, when necessary. Finally, OEO administers OIG's public affairs, media, and interagency activities, coordinates responses to Congressional requests for information, and also communicates OIG's planned and current activities and their results to the Commissioner and Congress.

## **Office of Investigations**

The Office of Investigations (OI) conducts and coordinates investigative activity related to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement of SSA programs and operations. This includes wrongdoing by applicants, beneficiaries, contractors, physicians, interpreters, representative payees, third parties, and by SSA employees in the performance of their duties. OI also conducts joint investigations with other Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies.

## **Counsel to the Inspector General**

The Counsel to the Inspector General provides legal advice and counsel to the Inspector General on various matters, including: 1) statutes, regulations, legislation, and policy directives governing the administration of SSA's programs; 2) investigative procedures and techniques; and 3) legal implications and conclusions to be drawn from audit and investigative material produced by the OIG. The Counsel's office also administers the civil monetary penalty program.