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Foreword

This report was prepared primarily to inform Congressional members and key staff of ongoing assignments in the General Accounting Office's Income Security issue area. This report contains assignments that were ongoing as of August 17, 1998, and presents a brief background statement and a list of key questions to be answered on each assignment. The report will be issued quarterly.

This report was compiled from information available in GAO's internal management information systems. Because the information was downloaded from computerized data bases intended for internal use, some information may appear in abbreviated form.

If you have questions or would like additional information about assignments listed, please contact Cynthia Fagnoni, Director, on (202) 512-7202; Mark Nadel, Associate Director, on (202) 512-7125; Diana Eisenstat, Associate Director, on (202) 512-5562; or Barbara Bovbjerg, Associate Director, on (202) 512-5491.

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REDESIGNING DISABILITY PROGRAMS

TITLE: **HRA:29 MANDATED STUDY ON ASSISTANCE TO CHILDREN ON SSI WITH DISABILITIES (207000)**

KEY QUESTIONS : The conference report accompanying the welfare reform bill stated that "Congress may revisit...the scope of [Supplemental Security Income (SSI) children's] benefits." To this end, Congress mandated that GAO report on extra expenses incurred by families of SSI children that are not covered by other federal, state, or local programs. Research objectives are to determine: (1) What disability-related expenses do families with SSI children incur? (2) How do federal, state, and local programs affect out-of-pocket expenses that families of SSI children incur?

TITLE: **HRA:29 SSA'S PROGRESS ON PLAN TO ELIMINATE BACKLOG OF CDRS (207006)**

KEY QUESTIONS : In October 1996, GAO reported on challenges the Social Security Administration (SSA) faces to successfully develop and implement a 7-year plan for eliminating the backlog of continuing disability reviews (CDR) in the Disability Insurance (DI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. (1) What progress has SSA made in developing a plan that accommodates newly required SSI CDRs, (2) how much has SSA spent on CDRs and does it expect authorized funding will be sufficient to fully implement the plan, and (3) what have been the results of SSA's plans for improving the effectiveness of the CDR selection process?

TITLE: **IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM ON SSI CHILDREN (207026)**

KEY QUESTIONS : In August 1996, the Congress enacted welfare reform legislation which raised the severity level for disabled children to be eligible for Suppmental Security Income (SSI) payments. The stricter standard applies to new applicants as well as children already receiving benefits, who were to be re-evaluated against the stricter standard. SSA was given until February 1998 to reassess children already on the rolls. The law mandates GAO to report on the impact of the eligibility changes on the SSI program for children. (1) What is the impact of SSA's implementation of the new eligibility standard on the number and characteristics of children receiving SSI benefits? (2) Are adjudicators applying the new eligibility standard accurately and consistently?

ENSURING ADEQUATE RETIREMENT BENEFITS

TITLE: **REVIEW OF PBGC'S SINGLE- AND MULTI-EMPLOYER INSURANCE PROGRAMS, PROJECTIONMODELS, AND SELECTED OPERATIONS (207010)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Despite improvements in the financial status of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) and private pension plans it insures, Congress remains concerned about the long-term financial viability of the pension insurance program. GAO was asked to review PBGC's single- and multi-employer pension programs, the status of the plans insured by these programs, PBGC's projection models, and other agency responsibilities. For this review, we will (1) present information on the current characteristics and funded status of both the single- and multi-employer insurance programs, (2) give distributional characteristics of insured pension plans, and (3) describe PBGC's current forecasting models and the status of their attempt to improve the models.

TITLE: **IN-SIGHTS FROM STATE AND LOCAL PENSION PLANS FOR NON-COVERED EMPLOYEES (207011)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Employees of state and local governments were originally not eligible for Social Security coverage. This was changed to allow these government units to elect Social Security coverage and to terminate this coverage. Three Texas counties withdrew from Social Security and established alternate plans. Proponents of Social Security privatization have pointed to these plans as examples of how Social Security can provide better benefits, while continuing to provide a secure basis of retirement income. (1) What are the principal features of these plans and how do benefits and coverage compare to Social Security? (2) What retirement, disability and survivor's benefits would "typical" high, median, and low earners receive under these alternate plans and Social Security?

TITLE: **MANDATORY SOCIAL SECURITY COVERAGE FOR STATE AND LOCAL EMPLOYEES (207012)**

KEY QUESTIONS : State and local government employees covered by public pension plans are the last remaining group of significant size that is exempt from mandatory Social Security coverage. The Social Security Advisory Council recommended extending mandatory coverage to all newly-hired public employees to reduce Social Security's long term actuarial deficit. (1) What are the implications of mandatory coverage for state and local government employers, employees, and their pension plans? (2) What is the probable impact of mandatory coverage on the Social Security program, including the trust funds and program administration and enforcement? (3) What potential legal and administrative problems, if any, are associated with mandatory coverage?

TITLE: **IMPLICATIONS OF ADDING RATE OF RETURN INFORMATION TO PEBES (207029)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Among the different proposals to reform the Social Security program, some call for creating individual retirement accounts. These accounts would permit greater flexibility in investment choices and presumably increase returns overall. Supporters of this option have proposed adding rate of return (ROR) information for the current Social Security program to the Personal Earnings and Benefit Estimate Statement (PEBES). We will report on (a) the purpose of PEBES, (b) the uses of ROR information, (c) what information the public would need for ROR information to be useful, and (d) how adding ROR information to PEBES would affect the production of the statement.

TITLE: **EVALUATING THE DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT ON MINORITIES OF SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM (207029)**

KEY QUESTIONS : The long-term financing problems of the Social Security system have led to several proposals for reform. One element of many of these proposals, sometimes called "privatization," is the establishment of individual accounts, controlled by the worker and invested in the stock market. One argument made by reform advocates is that minority groups in particular do not benefit fairly from the current Social Security system and would be better off under a privatized system because they could receive potentially higher rates of return on their investment. We will examine: (1) How do benefits received by minorities and non-minorities compare under the current Social Security system? (2) How would benefits received by minorities and non-minorities compare under a privatized system?

TITLE: **INVOLVED IN SOCIAL SECURITY FINANCING REFORM PROPOSALS (207447)**

KEY QUESTIONS : 1) What has caused Social Security's long-term financing problems? 2) What options could address these problems within the current program structure; what effect would these have on system solvency & beneficiaries? 3) What options are available involving fundamental program restructuring; what would be the effects? 4) What are the key issues in implementing privatized SS?

TITLE: **SOCIAL SECURITY RATES OF RETURN (207449)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Proponents of privatizing Social Security often note that workers could receive higher returns in the stock market than they do under Social Security. They note that rates of return under Social Security are very low and will get lower given demographic trends. Some say even low earners, who benefit from Social Security's redistributive aspects, would be better off with stock market rates of return. (1) What are Social Security's implicit rates of return and how do these rates vary by birth year, income level, and other demographic characteristics? (2) Do other money's-worth measures yield different relative outcomes than rates of return? (3) To what extent can Social Security's and the private market's rates of return be compared? How and why do they differ?

PROMOTING EFFICIENT, COST-EFFECTIVE GOVT

TITLE: **MANAGEMENT ACTIONS NEEDED TO ADDRESS LONGSTANDING PROBLEMS WITH THE SSI PROGRAM (105153)**

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What are the most significant problems regarding SSI program administration and what impact have these problems had on program integrity & performance? (2) What operational, programmatic or environmental factors caused these problems and what actions has SSA taken to solve them? (3) What management actions and legislative proposals should SSA pursue to address SSI program deficiencies?

TITLE: **REVIEW OF SSA'S EFFORTS TO DEVELOP A COUNTERFEIT-RESISTANT SOCIAL SECURITYCARD (105157)**

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) How reasonable are SSA's estimates for costs/workloads related to issuing a counterfeit-resistant social security card? (2) How do SSA's estimates compare to estimates by CBO? (3) What are the effects of charging user fees for replacement cards? (4) What potential problems exist for a counter-feit-resistant card due to current enumeraration & employment verification problems?

TITLE: **HRA:29 COORDINATION BETWEEN THE SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI) AND CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT (CSE) PROGRAM (116000)**

KEY QUESTIONS : An individual's child support income is considered in determining eligibility and benefit amounts for the TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and SSI programs. For all of these programs except SSI, applicants/recipients are required to cooperate with and receive services from the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program. (1) How many SSI recipients are potential child support recipients? (2) To what extent are SSI potential child support recipients receiving CSE services and reporting CSE collected support to SSA? (3) Could net savings accrue to the federal government through the collection and/or reporting of additional child support for SSI recipients?

TITLE: **REVOLVING DOOR PRACTICES IN SOCIAL SERVICE PRIVATIZATION (116011)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Our requesters expressed concern that ethics and accountability issues may limit fair competition and the extent to which contractors for state programs can be held accountable for program results. (1) To what extent have state employees moved from public agencies to social service contractors? (2) What effect has the movement of state employees from public agencies to social service contractors had on contract awards and state social service programs? (3) To what extent do state ethics and contracting policies address post-employment restrictions and accountability for program results in social service contracts?

TITLE: **SSA'S PROGRESS IN REENGINEERING ITS DISABILITY CLAIMS PROCESS (207007)**

KEY QUESTIONS : In Dec. 1996, GAO reported on SSA's effort to reengineer its disability claims process and cited a number of implementation difficulties. Responding to GAO's and stakeholders' concerns, SSA revised its reengineering plan in Feb. 1997. The Subcommittee subsequently asked GAO to evaluate: (1) What is SSA's experience with and current status of testing, evaluating, and/or implementing initiatives proposed under SSA's latest redesign plan? (2) What alternative approaches or practices could enhance the success of process improvement efforts at SSA?

TITLE: **HRA:29 REVIEW OF ALLEGATIONS OF SERVICE PROVIDER FRAUD IN SSI (207024)**

KEY QUESTIONS : GAO was asked to look into allegations that middlemen fraud among non-English speaking SSI applicants is a continuing problem, despite SSA's attempts to address it. Based on our preliminary work and subsequent conversations with the requester's staff, we have expanded the job to include all types of service providers and applicants. The job will focus on the following: (1) What is the potential risk that applicants become eligible for SSI by feigning or exaggerating their disabilities with the help of service providers? (2) How is SSA addressing service provider fraud and what are the benefits and limitations of these methods? (3) What other methods could SSA use to effectively deal with the service provider fraud and abuse problem?

TITLE: **HRA:29 REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF AMENDMENTS MADE BY THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND WORK OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 1996 ON PREVENTING THE PAYMENT OF SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME BENEFITS TO PRISONERS (207033)**

KEY QUESTIONS : In August 1996, Congress enacted legislation to help prevent prisoners from receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. The legislation authorized SSA to make incentive payments to state and local penal facilities for information used to suspend prisoner benefit payments. The legislation also mandated that GAO report on the impact of this incentive payment authority. (1) To what extent has SSA entered into incentive payment agreements with state and local penal facilities for prisoner data? (2) How many prisoners have been suspended, what amount of erroneous SSI payments may have been prevented, and what other benefits have been realized because SSA entered into incentive payment agreements with correctional facilities?

IMPROVING SSA SERVICE & OPERATIONS

TITLE: **SSA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH OMB AS AN INDEPENDENT AGENCY (207039)**

KEY QUESTIONS : In 1994, Congress enacted the Social Security Independence and Program Improvements Act of 1994, making SSA independent of the Department of Health and Human Services as of 3/31/95. GAO has been asked to follow up on our review in 1996 on the status of SSA as an independent agency. Specifically, we have been asked to provide information on SSA's relationship with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as an independent agency. (1) What is SSA's current practice when interacting with OMB on budget, legislative, and policy matters? (2) What are SSA's options, if any, when dealing with OMB on these matters?

PROMOTING RESPONSIBILITY & WORK

TITLE: **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND USE OF WELFARE (116018)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Concern exists regarding whether the time limits, work requirements, and child support enforcement provisions under welfare reform will make it more difficult for women and children receiving TANF to escape violent home situations and to transition from welfare to work. (1) What is the incidence of domestic violence for women receiving welfare? (2) What barriers does domestic violence present for women as they transition from welfare to work? (3) How are states addressing the welfare-to-work barriers for those who are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence, including screening for domestic violence and providing supportive services that support the transition to work? (4) What issues are states facing as they implement policies and procedures to address those barriers?

TITLE: **ANALYSIS OF STATE STUDIES OF FAMILIES WHO HAVE LEFT WELFARE (116019)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Welfare reform, designed to make welfare a transitional support for poor families, combined with unprecedented caseload declines, has generated concern about the status of families with children who are no longer receiving cash assistance. Consequently, most states are planning to track former recipients and a number of states already have completed studies of former welfare recipients. We are addressing: 1) What can be learned about the status of former welfare recipients from completed state studies? 2) How comparable and consistent is the information being collected by states? 3) What additional or improved information might be needed to more fully assess the status of families who have left welfare?

TITLE: **ASSESSING WELFARE INFORMATION SYSTEMS (116020)**

KEY QUESTIONS : A major objective of the 1996 welfare reform legislation is to reduce welfare dependence by helping parents obtain employment. The major changes in program focus and structure present substantial challenges for information systems. (1) What are the key information needs of (a) caseworkers and local managers to support their activities in moving parents to employment, (b) policymakers in monitoring employment progress and benefit receipt of welfare recipients, and (c) evaluators in determining program impacts pertaining to these two topics? (2) To what extent are these information needs being met and what are the major obstacles to meeting them? (3) What would facilitate addressing these obstacles?

TITLE: **REVIEW OF NATURALIZED IMMIGRANTS' USE OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AT THE FEDERAL AND STATE LEVEL (207036)**

KEY QUESTIONS : In 1996 and 1997, about 1.6 million immigrants became U.S. citizens. Some of these naturalized citizens may be utilizing various legal forms of public assistance at both the federal and state level. Public assistance includes programs such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps, and Medicaid. The objectives of this job are to determine: (1) How many naturalized citizens in INS' databases with valid SSNs are receiving some form of public assistance? (2) What is the estimated annual value of benefits provided to these persons by the federal and state governments? (3) How does the usage of public assistance by these persons compare to the general population?

PROTECTING CHILDREN'S WELFARE

TITLE: **IMPLICATIONS OF DRUG ABUSE & FOSTER CARE (105827)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Although foster care laws currently emphasize family reunification, this emphasis may not be appropriate for foster care cases involving parental substance abuse. 1) What are the characteristics of substance abuse, how are they relevant to foster care outcomes and the safety of children while in foster care, and what is the prevalence of parental substance abuse among foster care cases? 2) How, if at all, do foster care laws on family reunification, other permanency decisions, and safety address the issue of parental substance abuse? 3) Given the characteristics of substance abuse and existing foster care laws, regulations and policies, what are the implications of parental substance abuse for foster care outcomes and the safety of children while in foster care?

TITLE: **IMPLICATIONS OF THE EXPANDED ROLE OF KINSHIP CARE (105828)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Recent welfare law requires states to give priority to children's relatives when making foster care placements. While this may help children maintain family ties, these placements often receive less attention from foster care agencies, raising concerns about children's experiences. (1) How do foster children in kinship care fare relative to foster children in other placement settings in the dimensions of continuity, permanency, and quality? (2) In what areas, if any, are safeguards needed to improve outcomes for kinship care?

TITLE: **MANAGED CARE PLANS FOR CHILD WELFARE AND HEALTH SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE (116005)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Child welfare agencies are looking at managed care--including capitating payments and using performance goals in contracts--as a new model for managing foster care services. But experts caution that similar arrangements in health care are not directly transferable to child welfare. The absence of outcome & cost data & a client population that is difficult to serve will challenge public officials in establishing managed care arrangements. (1) What are the financial & service delivery arrangements under managed care that are being applied to the child welfare system? (2) To what extent are child welfare agencies using these arrangements for services to foster care children & their families? (3) What issues do child welfare agencies face as they develop & implement managed care?

TITLE: **REVIEW OF STATES' EFFORTS TO REFORM JUVENILE DEPENDENCY COURTS TO ACHIEVE TIMELY PERMANENCY (116010)**

KEY QUESTIONS : State juvenile dependency courts are critical to ensure children in foster care achieve a permanent placement within established time frames. Historically, however, these courts have faced numerous systemic and process-related problems. Since the court wields unique and substantial power in maltreatment cases, these problems can affect the length of time children remain in foster care. States are undertaking various reforms to address these problems. Examining these efforts will provide information on the extent of programs underway and the results attained to date. (1) What key problems have been identified in the court system? (2) How have reform efforts addressed these problems and what results have been achieved? (3) What role have child welfare agencies played in reforming courts?

TITLE: **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MULTIETHNIC PLACEMENT ACT OF 1994 AND ITS AMENDMENTS (116013)**

KEY QUESTIONS : The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA), amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provisions, sought to: decrease the length of time that foster children wait to be adopted; prevent discrimination in the placement of children on the basis of race, color, or national origin; and facilitate the recruitment of foster and adoptive families. States were to comply with MEPA by 10/95 and with the amendments by 8/96. We will examine (1) efforts to implement the original MEPA in the areas of foster care and adoption policy guidance, training, and compliance monitoring; (2) efforts to implement the 1996 amendments in the areas of foster care and adoption placement policies, technical assistance, and compliance monitoring; and (3) the challenges to be met to change placement practices.

TITLE: **COST OF MILITARY'S CHILD CARE SYSTEM (116016)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Current national debate has raised issues regarding the importance of high-quality care to children's well-being. The cost of such care is a key issue in this debate. While the military's child development system is often heralded as providing the highest quality child care in the U.S., little information is available on the cost of its child care programs and how they compare to those in the civilian sector. (1) What are the objectives of the military child care system and how do its various programs operate? (2) What is the full cost of the military child care center program? (3) How do per child costs of military and civilian child care centers compare?

OTHER ISSUE AREA WORK: INCOME SECURITY

TITLE: **HOW PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS USE SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS (207023)**

KEY QUESTIONS : Concerns about use of social security numbers (SSNs) arose from the sale of personal information & incidents of identity fraud involving SSNs. The federal government & businesses use SSNs to manage automated record systems & data exchanges, e.g., to identify tax payers & require them as a condition of eligibility for some federal programs, driver's licensing, & financial services. Some SSN uses are not specifically authorized or restricted by law. To assist the Subcommittee's deliberations of a proposal to restrict SSN use, GAO will provide information on (1) required & prohibited SSN uses, (2) ways organizations use SSNs which are not required but are permitted by federal law, (3) the extent of use of SSNs, and (4) the impact of restricting businesses' SSN use.