

The Social Security Administration's Reduction in Field Office Operating Hours

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine the effect of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) decision to reduce field office (FO) hours to the public.

Background

FOs are SSA's primary points of contact for face-to-face service with the public. In August 2011, SSA began closing FOs (nationwide) 30 minutes earlier each day. In November 2012, SSA extended these early closures to 1 hour. In January 2013, SSA further reduced FO hours by closing every Wednesday at noon. With the reduced hours, FOs were open to the public 27 hours compared to the previous 35 hours per week.

Since Fiscal Year 2011, SSA has experienced increased workloads as well as decreased staffing levels and budgets. Therefore, SSA took measures to continue providing adequate service to the public, including reducing FO hours. Although the FO is closed to the public, SSA staff continues working. According to SSA, the reduced public hours allow staff to complete face-to-face interviews and process claims with reduced overtime costs.

Our Findings

The public was sometimes unaware and personally affected by the reduced FO hours. Consequently, the public's satisfaction with FO hours decreased. In addition, some FO managers reported that the reduced public hours generally improved workload processing as well as staff training and morale. However, some FO managers reported drawbacks from the reduced public hours, such as increased wait times, crowded lobbies, and limited appointment availability.

SSA should continue communicating FO hours and other service methods, such as the National 800-Number and Website, to the public, other government agencies, and service organizations.