Follow-up: The Social Security Administration's Implementation of Mail Procedures
042312

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration's (SSA) offices were complying with the requirements established in the Agency's Mail Handling Business Process Document (BPD).

Background

Mail processing at SSA offices is primarily a manual workload. This requires that managers and employees open each mail item, scan the program-related documents into a workload management system, and assign to staff. SSA's regional offices are responsible for monitoring the status of mail handling in their region.

In July 2021, we issued an interim report on The *Social Security Administration's Processing of Mail and Enumeration Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic* that highlighted the exponential increase in the Agency's volume of mail, and SSA did not have detailed policies or performance metrics related to mail processing. In September 2021, SSA issued a Mail Handling BPD that focused on 10 key issues significant to mail processing. In May 2022, we reported on efforts SSA had taken to address our earlier findings; however, we did not verify SSA's new mail procedures worked as intended.

We judgmentally selected and visited 87 SSA offices throughout the continental United States. At each office, we interviewed management and observed the mail handling process.

Results

SSA offices had improved mail processing since our July 2021 review. SSA offices we visited generally complied with the requirements in the Agency's Mail Handling BPD. The BPD provided guidance and direction to help employees effectively process mail. While most offices were meeting the requirements of 6 of the 10 BPD key issues, some offices did not always meet the requirements for the following 4 key issues:

1. Undeliverable returned mail,

2. Remittances and returned unendorsed Department of the Treasury checks,

3. Mail triaging and timeliness, and

4. Scanning mail.

According to 48 (55 percent) of 87 office managers, a staffing shortage was the main cause of delays in mail handling because they had to prioritize servicing in-office customers over processing mail.

SSA recognized the BPD mail-handling timeliness metrics needed to be adjusted to correspond with workloads, and the monitoring process could be enhanced because it did not identify all non-compliant offices that required remediation. SSA stated it is working with the non-compliant offices we identified to determine whether remediation is needed and is continuing with automation initiatives to centralize and digitize mail handling.

Recommendations

1. Evaluate and adjust, where appropriate, the timeliness metrics for mail handling to correspond with, and support, the current mail workload.

2. Evaluate and adjust, where appropriate, the monitoring process for mail handling to better identify non-compliant offices that require remediation.

3. Take action, as needed, for offices we identified as non-compliant with the BPD requirements.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.