



Office of the Inspector General
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Audit Report

Unclaimed Social Security
Administration Assets Held by
States and the District of
Columbia

062329 September 2024



Office of the Inspector General

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 24, 2024

Refer to: 062329

To: Martin O'Malley
Commissioner

From: Michelle L. Anderson *Michelle L. Anderson*
Assistant Inspector General for Audit
as Acting Inspector General

Subject: Unclaimed Social Security Administration Assets Held by States and the District of Columbia

The attached final report presents the results of the Office of Audit's review. The objective was to determine whether Social Security Administration timely recovered unclaimed assets held by states and the District of Columbia.

If you wish to discuss the final report, please contact Mark Searight, Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Audit.

Attachment

Unclaimed Social Security Administration Assets Held by States and the District of Columbia

062329



September 2024

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether Social Security Administration (SSA) timely recovered unclaimed assets held by states and the District of Columbia.

Background

Unclaimed assets refer to many types of federally owned monetary assets held by state or local governments, financial institutions, corporations, and other entities that have had no recorded activity or contact from the assets' owner for 1 year or longer.

The Department of the Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service (Fiscal Service) establishes Government-wide policies and guidelines regarding the Federal agencies' efforts to locate, recover, and account for unclaimed Federal assets. According to Fiscal Service, if an agency uses internal efforts to recover unclaimed property, a "timely recovery effort" is evidenced by the federal agency's submission of a claim package to the appropriate holder within 2 years of the holder reporting the asset's availability.

SSA does not use internal efforts to locate or recover its unclaimed assets. Instead, SSA relies on Fiscal Service to recover its unclaimed assets.

We identified unclaimed SSA assets held by all 50 states and District of Columbia as of December 2023. We also obtained data on unclaimed SSA assets collected by Fiscal Service during Fiscal Years (FY) 2021 through 2023.

Results

SSA did not timely recover unclaimed assets held by states and the District of Columbia. As of December 2023, we identified 4,228 unclaimed SSA assets held by all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Multiple states' websites listed SSA assets initially reported as unclaimed in the 1990s or early 2000's:

- 5 states reported 1,171 unclaimed assets worth \$933,414 (average of \$797 per asset).
- 45 states and the District of Columbia listed 3,057 unclaimed assets held on SSA's behalf; however, these websites did not disclose the value of the assets or provided only a range of the assets' value (for example "over \$250" or "over \$1,000").

SSA relied on Fiscal Service to recover unclaimed assets on its behalf, with no ability to oversee collection activities. During FYs 2021 through 2023, Fiscal Service recovered unclaimed SSA assets from 17 states and the District of Columbia totaling \$284,216, \$159,335, and \$269,844, respectively. These are relatively small amounts compared to the unclaimed SSA assets reported on state websites at the time of our review.

Recommendation

We recommended that SSA develop its own internal program to recover unclaimed assets instead of remaining dependent upon Fiscal Service. SSA agreed with the recommendation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Fiscal Service Department of the Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service

FY Fiscal Year

OIG Office of the Inspector General

SSA Social Security Administration

OBJECTIVE

Our objective was to determine whether Social Security Administration (SSA) timely recovered unclaimed assets held by states and the District of Columbia.

BACKGROUND

Unclaimed assets, also known as “abandoned property,” refer to many types of federally owned monetary assets held by state or local governments, financial institutions, corporations, and other entities that have had no recorded activity or contact from the owner for 1 year or longer. Federal agencies may recover unclaimed assets from various sources, including states that have enacted unclaimed property laws to protect those assets until they are claimed. These laws generally require that entities surrender unclaimed assets to the state’s custody when the property’s rightful owner cannot be located. Examples include unnegotiated money orders, cashier’s checks, and certified checks payable to SSA but returned to banks or other issuing companies. After a period of time, the banks or issuing companies clear these assets from their books by remitting the associated funds to the state, which, in turn, report the assets’ availability on its website.

The Department of the Treasury’s Bureau of the Fiscal Service (Fiscal Service) establishes Government-wide policies and guidelines regarding the efforts of Federal agencies to locate, recover, and account for unclaimed Federal financial assets (unclaimed assets).¹ Fiscal Service requires Federal agencies to establish and implement procedures to locate and recover unclaimed assets. Agencies must designate at least one unclaimed asset recovery official and must establish internal procedures for the recovery of unclaimed assets. The unclaimed asset recovery official must ensure that the agency establishes and follows procedures per the guidelines in applicable Treasury Financial Regulations. Agencies can:

- use internal efforts to locate and recover unclaimed assets,
- ask Fiscal Service to locate and recover assets on the agency’s behalf, or
- enter into contracts with finders, after obtaining Fiscal Service’s approval of the agency’s asset recovery procedures.²

If an agency uses internal efforts to recover unclaimed property, it must review relevant holders’ records to locate possible unclaimed assets that belong to the agency. According to Fiscal Service, a “timely recovery effort” is evidenced by the federal agency’s submission of a claim package to the appropriate holder within 2 years of the holder reporting the asset’s availability. When Fiscal Service discovers that the agency has not made a timely recovery effort to recover unclaimed assets, Fiscal Service will locate and recover unclaimed assets on behalf of the agency.³

SSA designated an Office of Finance employee to serve as the Agency’s unclaimed asset official. The employee performs unclaimed asset responsibilities as an additional duty. SSA

¹ Treasury Financial Manual, vol. 1, pt. 3, ch. 8000, <https://tfx.treasury.gov/tfm> (August 6, 2024).

² Treasury Financial Manual, vol. 1, pt. 3, ch. 8000, sec. 8025, <https://tfx.treasury.gov/tfm> (August 6, 2024).

³ Treasury Financial Manual, vol. 1, pt. 3, ch. 8000, sec. 8035, <https://tfx.treasury.gov/tfm> (August 6, 2024).

does not use internal efforts to locate or recover its unclaimed assets and has not developed internal procedures to do so. Instead, SSA relies on Fiscal Service to recover its unclaimed assets. Fiscal Service collects SSA's unclaimed assets on its own pace, and once a year processes an Intragovernmental Payment and Collection transaction to transfer to SSA any funds collected during the year. SSA has a process to collect, deposit, and report the recoveries in Appendix D of the SSA's *Division of Administrative and Reimbursable Collections, Monthly Performance Metrics*.

Each state has a process for researching unclaimed assets. Many states use the same general approach and allow searches of their databases at no cost. The National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators website⁴ contains direct links to unclaimed asset websites for all participating states.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We identified the unclaimed SSA assets reported on the websites of all 50 states and District of Columbia. We obtained unclaimed asset data directly from California's Controller Office because California held more than 500 unclaimed SSA assets but its website's display was limited to only 500 assets. We also obtained unclaimed asset data directly from Indiana's Attorney General Office, Unclaimed Property Division. We gathered data from August 2023 through June 2024. Additionally, we obtained data on unclaimed SSA assets collected by Fiscal Service during Fiscal Years (FY) 2021 through 2023. See Appendix A for more scope and methodology information.

RESULTS OF REVIEW

SSA did not timely recover unclaimed assets held by states and the District of Columbia. As of December 2023, we had identified 4,228 unclaimed SSA assets held by all 50 states and the District of Columbia. See Appendix B for a summary of SSA assets reported on the states' websites. As of the date of our review, multiple states' websites had listed SSA assets that were initially reported as unclaimed as early as the 1990s or early 2000's.

- 5 states reported 1,171 unclaimed assets worth \$933,414 (per asset average of \$797).
- 45 states and the District of Columbia listed 3,057 unclaimed assets held on behalf of SSA; however, these websites did not disclose the value of the assets or provided only a range of the assets' value (for example "under \$50," "over \$250," or "over \$1,000").

Unclaimed Assets Not Recovered

SSA relied on Fiscal Service to recover unclaimed assets on its behalf. During FYs 2021 through 2023,⁵ Fiscal Service recovered unclaimed SSA assets from 17 states and the District of Columbia totaling \$284,216, \$159,335, and \$269,844, respectively. These are relatively

⁴ <https://unclaimed.org> (August 6, 2024).

⁵ SSA's *Division of Administrative and Reimbursable Collections, Monthly Performance Metrics*, Appendix D reported unclaimed SSA assets recovered during FYs 2021 and 2022. The FY 2023 unclaimed asset recovery amount was provided by Fiscal Service.

small amounts compared to the unclaimed SSA assets reported on state websites at the time of our review.

SSA's unclaimed asset official informed us that SSA has no formal, written agreement with Fiscal Service that establishes Fiscal Service's responsibilities for timely collection of SSA assets. Because Fiscal Service's responsibilities are not delineated, SSA has no ability to oversee collection activities and is completely reliant upon Fiscal Service to provide this service.

We contacted the Fiscal Service Unclaimed Asset Analyst responsible for recovering SSA's unclaimed assets. The analyst is the sole Fiscal Service employee assigned to recover unclaimed assets for all Federal agencies that rely upon Fiscal Service. The analyst said the workload is more than one person can do, and that Federal assets are recovered as time permits.

From its historical understanding and experience working with Treasury and the states, Agency officials stated the recovery process requires providing proof that the funds submitted on claims belong to the agency and may require the claim submissions to be notarized. Officials stated SSA cannot give evidence of the agency's entitlement, as in most cases, what is cited on the listing is the only information made available by the state. Officials cited the following barriers that prevented SSA from attempting to recover its own unclaimed assets:

- Some assets listed on state websites included the names of co-owners,
- Some assets listed on state websites did not include complete address information that SSA could link to an agency office, and
- Recovery protocols varied state-to-state and SSA has limited resources to use internal efforts to recover unclaimed property.

We address each barrier below.

Assets with Co-owners

Agency officials stated that some unclaimed assets listed on state websites include the name of an individual co-owner. Agency officials stated that if an SSA property has a co-owner, most states will reject the claim. However, we reviewed all 4,228 of SSA's unclaimed assets listed on state websites and determined this impairment applied to only 6 percent of unclaimed assets listed on state unclaimed asset websites. Therefore, even if states will not remit assets with co-owners, the other 94 percent of unclaimed assets listed on unclaimed property websites do not list co-owners and would be subject to recovery.

Assets with Limited Address Information

According to Agency officials, some states provide only limited information, such as the SSA property address associated with unclaimed assets listed on their websites, making it unclear whether SSA is entitled to the assets. However, we reviewed all 4,228 of SSA's unclaimed assets listed on state websites and determined 1,593 (38 percent) of the assets included a partial or no SSA property address.

This amount included 498 assets worth \$636,994, held by California. We determined the lack of address information associated with these assets did not affect SSA's ability to recover assets.

Figure 1 below provides an example where asset reported on California’s website identified the address of an SSA field office and Figure 2 below provides an example where asset reported on California’s website did not include address information.

Figure 1: Example Where California Website Included an Address

	Property#	Name ▲	Address	City	State	ZIP	Amount	Co-Owner(s)	Property Indicator	Property Type
<input type="button" value="Add"/>	1026456353	SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION	2424 ARDEN WAY	SACRAMENTO	CA	95825	\$66.79		Cash	P
Reported By: DS SERVICES OF AMERICA INC										
Description: Refunds Due										

Figure 2: Example Where California Website did not Include an Address

	Property#	Name ▲	Address	City	State	ZIP	Amount	Co-Owner(s)	Property Indicator	Property Type
<input type="button" value="Add"/>	981313600	SOCIAL SECURITY ADMIN				00000	\$35.00		Cash	P
Reported By: THE GOLDEN 1 CREDIT UNION										
Description: Cashier's Checks										

Because California reported the highest volume of SSA’s unclaimed assets, we contacted California officials and obtained their unclaimed assets claims filing instructions. The instructions note that for government agencies, additional documentation, such as proof of property address or proof the property belongs to the agency if the listed asset includes no reported address, is necessary *only when the reported owner of the property is not clearly the agency*. Because the *Social Security Administration* was listed as the owner of all 498 unclaimed assets with only partial or no property address appearing on the California unclaimed asset website, the missing property address information did not affect SSA’s ability to recover the assets. Further, we also verified that California did not publish all asset information on its website and retained full property address information in cases where it displayed partial or no address information on its website. Therefore, the lack of address information appearing on an unclaimed asset website does not necessarily affect SSA’s ability to recover the assets.

Protocols Vary by State

Agency officials stated the asset recovery process was difficult because recovery protocols varied by state and in most cases, the states provide limited information on the unclaimed assets, which makes it unclear if the agency is entitled to them.

To assess the difficulty of recovering unclaimed assets, in December 2023, we contacted the California State Controller’s Office, Unclaimed Property Division, whose office held 953 unclaimed SSA assets, worth \$815,756. A representative from that office informed us that, for SSA to recover the property, it needed to submit a claim form that itemized the requested property. The representative generated and provided a 180-page consolidated *Claim Affirmation Form* that itemized 953 unclaimed SSA assets and provided simple instructions for SSA to recover the assets. See Appendix C for California’s claim instructions. We provided the Form and instructions to SSA’s Unclaimed Property Official on December 11, 2023. However, instead of signing and submitting the claim form to the California State Controller’s Office, SSA forwarded the Form to Fiscal Service, and is now dependent upon Fiscal Service to recover the

assets on SSA' behalf. As of August 2024, Fiscal Service had not submitted this claim to the State of California.

We also contacted the Indiana⁶ Attorney General's Office, Unclaimed Property Division, to obtain assistance with identifying unclaimed SSA assets. The same day, Indiana officials provided a completed claim form that listed 282 unclaimed SSA assets with a cumulative value of approximately \$275,000. State officials informed us that, to obtain the assets, SSA should return the claim form, and provide the Agency's Federal Employer Identification Number and the photo identification of a person authorized to claim the assets on SSA's behalf. We provided the claim form to SSA's Unclaimed Property Official on June 24, 2024.

Based on our contacts with California and Indiana, the unclaimed assets recovery process is neither difficult nor labor intensive.

RECOMMENDATION

We identified that SSA's current process for recovering its unclaimed assets is not working effectively. The reasons SSA provided for not recovering its unclaimed assets also apply to Fiscal Service; and therefore, do not justify reliance on Fiscal Service to recover SSA's unclaimed assets. We recommend that SSA develop its own internal program to recover unclaimed assets instead of remaining dependent upon Fiscal Service.

AGENCY COMMENTS

SSA agreed with the recommendation. The Agency's comments are included in Appendix D.

⁶ We contacted unclaimed property officials at the four states with the highest number of unclaimed SSA assets at the time of our review (California, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Colorado). Colorado was working with Fiscal Service to recover SSA's unclaimed assets, so we did not request they generate a claim form. Pennsylvania officials stated it was the annual reporting season for their office, and thus a busy time of the year for them and requested we contact them later this year.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

To accomplish our objective, we:

- Reviewed the Department of the Treasury’s regulations and applicable policies governing the recovery of unclaimed assets.
- Identified unclaimed assets reported all 50 states and the District of Columbia websites, and interviewed California, Indiana, Colorado, and Pennsylvania officials to identify assets the states reported as belonging to the Social Security Administration (SSA) and identified actions SSA has taken to recover the unclaimed assets.
- Interviewed SSA’s Unclaimed Asset Recovery Official from the Division of Administrative and Reimbursable Collections and discussed SSA’s policy and procedures for submitting claims to recover unclaimed assets. We also discussed the agency’s efforts to locate and recover unclaimed assets, as well as SSA’s methods for recovering unclaimed assets from states.
- Interviewed with Department of the Treasury’s Unclaimed Asset Official and discussed their role in recovering unclaimed assets for the Social Security Administration.

The audited entity was SSA’s Division of Reimbursable and Administrative Collections. We assessed the significance of internal controls necessary to satisfy the audit objective. This included an assessment of the five internal control components, including control environment, risk assessment, control activities, information and communication, and monitoring. In addition, we reviewed the principles of internal controls associated with the audit objective. We identified the following Components and Principles as significant to the audit objective:

- Component 3: Control Activities
 - Principle 10: Design Control Activities
 - Principle 12: Implement Control Activities
- Component 5: Monitoring
 - Principle 16: Perform Monitoring Activities

We conducted our review between October 2023 and July 2024 in Dallas, Texas. We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix B – INDIVIDUAL STATE DATA

Table B–1: Unclaimed Assets by State as of December 2023

State	Number of Assets	Lowest Value	Highest Value	Total
California	953	\$1	\$68,068	\$815,756
Hawaii	9	\$8	\$111	\$406
Texas	191	\$25	\$12,496	\$115,566
Utah	16	\$27	\$250	\$1,602
Wyoming	2	\$41	\$43	\$84
Alaska	91	Under \$25	Over \$100	
Alabama	25	Under \$100	Over \$100	
Arkansas	32	Under \$50	Over \$100	
Arizona	34	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	
Colorado	269	Under \$5	Over \$250	
Connecticut	41	Under \$100	Over \$100	
District of Columbia	11	Under \$50	Over \$50	
Delaware	10	Under \$50	Over \$50	
Florida	96	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	
Georgia	51	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	
Iowa	17	Under \$100	Over \$100	
Idaho	33	\$5 - \$25	Over \$100	
Illinois	159	Under \$100	Over \$100	
Indiana	229	\$12	Over \$100	
Kansas	76	Under \$100	Over \$100	
Kentucky	45	Under \$10	Over \$100	
Louisiana	15	Under \$25	Over \$100	
Massachusetts	88	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	
Maryland	188	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	
Maine	2	Over \$25	Over \$1,000	
Michigan	29	Under \$100	Over \$250	
Minnesota	39	Under \$250	Over \$250	
Missouri	43	\$8	Over \$50	
Mississippi	8	Under \$100	Over \$100	
Montana	12	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	
North Carolina	176	\$14	Over \$100	
North Dakota	12	Under \$50	Over \$1,000	
Nebraska	15	Under \$250	Over \$250	
New Hampshire	6	Under \$100	Over \$100	
New Jersey	97	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	

State	Number of Assets	Lowest Value	Highest Value	Total
New Mexico	69	Under \$25	Over \$1,000	
Nevada	79	Under \$25	Over \$1,000	
New York	116	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	
Ohio	70	Under \$25	Over \$100	
Oklahoma	15	Under \$100	Over \$100	
Oregon	36	Under \$25	Over \$100	
Pennsylvania	277	Under \$100	Over \$100	
Rhode Island	18	Under \$50	Over \$100	
South Carolina	19	Under \$100	Over \$100	
South Dakota	6	\$13	Over \$250	
Tennessee	102	\$25	Over \$250	
Virginia	122	Under \$50	Over \$100	
Vermont	11	Under \$100	Over \$200	
Washington	83	Under \$25	Over \$100	
Wisconsin	55	Under \$10	Over \$1,000	
West Virginia	30	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	
Total	4,228	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	\$933,414

Appendix C – CALIFORNIA UNCLAIMED PROPERTY GOVERNMENT CLAIM FILING INSTRUCTIONS



Controller Malia M. Cohen California State Controller's Office Unclaimed Property Division

GOVERNMENT CLAIM FILING INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUESTED DOCUMENTATION

To claim a property on behalf of a government agency (herein agency), please provide the following:

1. Completed Claim Affirmation Form signed by an agent or officer claiming the property on behalf of the agency. If you are claiming multiple properties, you may file one completed Claim Affirmation Form and attach either a copy of each Property Detail Screen from the website or a spreadsheet listing all Property ID numbers, reported owner(s), and amounts being claimed on behalf of the agency.
 - A. You must notarize the Claim Affirmation Form if:
 - 1) The total value of the claim is \$1,000 or greater;
 - 2) The claim is for safe deposit box contents; or
 - 3) The claim is for securities, such as:
 - a) Stocks;
 - b) Mutual funds;
 - c) Bonds; or
 - d) Debentures.
2. A 'Letter of Authorization' on agency letterhead from an official with the agency, authorizing an agent or officer to claim the property on behalf of the agency.
3. A copy of the agency-issued photo identification card for the agent or officer authorized to file the claim. If this is not available, other allowable identification includes:
 - A. Driver License
 - B. State-Issued Identification Card

Note: In lieu of a copy of a driver license, it is acceptable to send in a notarized statement with the agent/officer's name, driver license number, driver license expiration date and date of birth.

4. The agency Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) should be clearly typed or written on the Claim Affirmation Form.
5. If we cannot verify a claim based on the FEIN, because the company reporting the property did not provide the FEIN when transferring the property to us, and if the reported owner name of the property is not clearly the agency, we will need additional documentation as described below to verify your claim. Therefore, if you have these documents available, please submit them when you file the claim to ensure speedy processing of the claim.

EITHER

- A. Proof the agency operated or received mail at the reported address. You can find the reported owner address on the claim details page printed with your claim form. If you cannot provide this documentation with your claim, we may contact you for additional information. Suggested documents:
 - 1) Original bill or account statement from the reporting company
 - 2) Copy of business license
 - 3) Copy of received tax statement, such as:



Controller Malia M. Cohen

California State Controller's Office

Unclaimed Property Division

GOVERNMENT CLAIM

FILING INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUESTED DOCUMENTATION

- a. IRS Form 1098, statement of interest paid
- b. IRS Form 1099-INT or 1099-DIV, statement of interest or dividends earned
- c. Copy of mortgage statement or real estate property tax bill
- d. Original telephone, cable, or utility bill
- e. Original bank or credit card statement

OR

- B. If there is no reported address on the claim details page printed with your claim form, provide proof that the property belongs to the agency. If you cannot provide this documentation with your claim, we may contact you for additional information.**

Suggested documents:

- 1) Original bank statement (if the property is from a bank or financial institution)
 - 2) Copy of stock certificate or original account statement (if the property is from an investment company)
 - 3) Original invoice or receipt from the reporting company
 - 4) List of the safe deposit box contents (if the property is a safe deposit box)
6. If the property you are claiming is a negotiable instrument, such as a check, cashier's check, traveler's check, money order, bond, or bond coupon, and you have the original instrument, provide a copy of the negotiable instrument with the claim. If we determine that we have your funds, we will contact you for additional information.

Send all documents to:

State Controller's Office
Unclaimed Property Division
P.O. Box 942850
Sacramento, CA 94250-5873

Send overnight mail or hand deliver documents to:

State Controller's Office
Unclaimed Property Division
10600 White Rock Road, Suite 141
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670

If you have any questions regarding these instructions or requested documents, please call us at (800) 992-4647.

Appendix D – AGENCY COMMENTS




SOCIAL SECURITY

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 16, 2024

Refer To: TQA-1

To: Michelle L. H. Anderson
Acting Inspector General

From: Dustin Brown 
Acting Chief of _____

Subject: Office of the Inspector General Draft Memorandum “Unclaimed Social Security Administration Assets Held by States and the District of Columbia” (062329) -- INFORMATION

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report. We agree with the recommendation. Although reliance on Fiscal Service has been our past practice, we are committed to evaluating the data provided by the Office of the Inspector General and working with states to assess ways to improve our collection of unclaimed funds.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance. You may direct staff inquiries to Hank Amato at (407) 765-9774.



Mission:

The Social Security Office of the Inspector General (OIG) serves the public through independent oversight of SSA's programs and operations.

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