Office of the Inspector General
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Congressional Response Report

The Social Security Administration's Telephone Service Performance

A-05-20-50999 / *November 2021*

Office of the Inspector General
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

November 29, 2021

The Honorable John B. Larson
Chair, Subcommittee on
  Social Security
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Reed
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
  Social Security
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Larson and Ranking Member Reed:

In a July 21, 2020 letter, you asked that we review the Social Security Administration's (SSA) telephone services during the COVID-19 pandemic. This report provides performance and customer service information for SSA's national 800-number and field office telephone services especially as they relate to the COVID-19 pandemic.

My office is committed to combating fraud, waste, and abuse in SSA's operations and programs. Thank you for bringing your concerns to my attention. The report highlights various facts pertaining to the issues raised in your letter. To ensure SSA is aware of the information provided to your office, we are forwarding a copy of this report to the Agency.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please call me or have your staff contact Ranju Shrestha, Legislative Counsel to the Inspector General, at (410) 966-4440.

Sincerely,

Gail S. Ennis
Inspector General

Enclosure

cc:
Kilolo Kijakazi

The Social Security Administration's Telephone Service Performance

A-05-20-50999

Objective

To review the Social Security Administration's (SSA) telephone services, especially as they relate to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

On July 21, 2020, John Larson, Chair, and Tom Reed, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Social Security, requested we answer a series of questions related to SSA's telephone services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For this review, we obtained SSA's telephone service data for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 (October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020). We compared SSA's performance data from October 2019 through March 2020 with the data from April through September 2020, when SSA limited in-person service. We also compared SSA's FY 2020 performance to other Federal agencies' and industry performance and to SSA's telephone service performance in FYs 2010 through 2019. In addition, we obtained information on changes in staffing and workloads, including steps SSA took to strengthen telephone services and better track and evaluate callers' experience and satisfaction in FY 2020. Finally, we identified changes SSA made in response to COVID-19, their effect on telephone performance metrics and customer service, and lessons SSA learned during COVID-19 related to telephone services.

Results

In FY 2020, SSA received over 151 million calls at its field offices and the national 800-number. SSA handled over half of those calls through a combination of calls answered by SSA employees and addressed by automated services.

Calls SSA Received in FY 2020
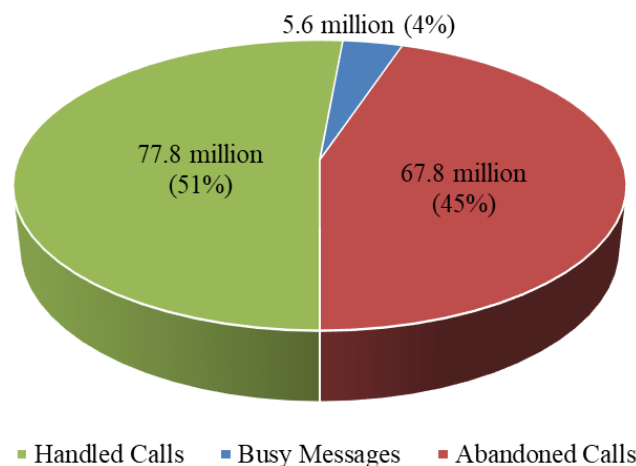
SSA's telephone services shifted to more calls to field offices in FY 2020 when the Agency limited in-person service and provided the public with more field office telephone numbers. The increase in field office calls resulted in increased busy messages and wait times toward the end of FY 2020. SSA adjusted national 800-number operations during the pandemic to reduce wait times and the number of callers who received a busy message. National 800-number performance began to decline toward the end of the FY, though it was still better than pre-pandemic performance.

When comparing SSA to 13 customer service call centers from 10 other Federal agencies, SSA had a higher call volume in FY 2020 with similar or better performance.

To reduce wait times, improve caller experience, and ensure more calls are handled, SSA hired additional 800-number staff, modified automated service options, and plans to implement a new telephone system.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

FY	Fiscal Year
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
PC	Processing Center
SSA	Social Security Administration
TSC	Teleservice Center

OBJECTIVE

Our objective was to review the Social Security Administration's (SSA) telephone services, especially as they relate to the COVID-19 pandemic.[1]

BACKGROUND

On July 21, 2020, John Larson, Chair, and Tom Reed, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Social Security, requested we answer a series of questions related to SSA's telephone services during the COVID-19 pandemic.[2] In response to this request, we conducted two reviews that analyzed performance and customer service information for SSA's national 800-number and field office telephone services. We issued our first report in April 2021.[3]

SSA's telephone services consist of a national 800-number and a network of 1,193 field offices. SSA's 24 teleservice centers (TSC) are responsible for answering calls to the national 800-number. Calls to the national 800-number are handled through a combination of calls answered by SSA employees and addressed by automated services (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: National 800-number Call Flowchart

---
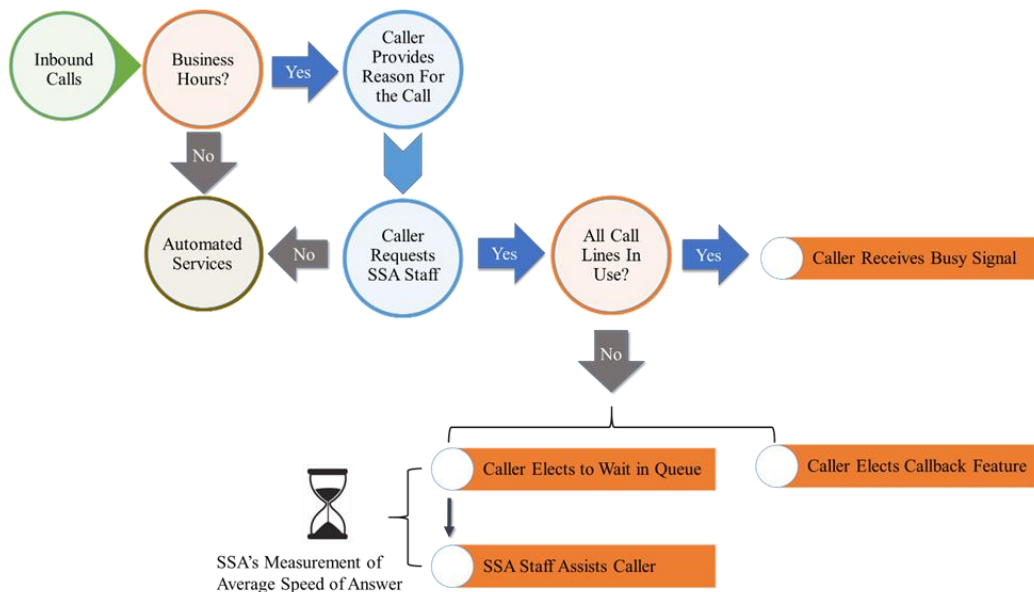
[1] The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020. World Health Organization, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Events As They Happen,* who.int (October 15, 2021).

[2] See Appendix A for the request.

[3] SSA OIG, *The Social Security Administration's Telephone Services During June 2020*, A-05-20-50998, (April 2021).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, SSA limited in-person field office service to appointment-only for certain dire-need situations and moved TSCs to a virtual environment in March 2020.[4] Although in-person service is limited, field office employees continue assisting people by telephone.[5] As of November 2021, SSA had not resumed its pre-COVID-19 operating procedures. However, SSA gave notice to employees it would start the reentry process beginning December 1, 2021.

For this review, we obtained SSA's telephone service data for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 (October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020). We compared SSA's telephone services' performance data from October 2019 through March 2020 with the data from April through September 2020, when SSA limited in person service. We also compared SSA's FY 2020 performance to other Federal agencies and industry performance. We obtained March 2021 telephone service data to provide a snapshot of SSA's performance 1 year into the pandemic. We also compared SSA's FY 2020 performance to FYs 2010 through 2019.[6] In addition, we obtained information on changes in staffing and workloads, including steps SSA took to strengthen telephone services and better track and evaluate callers' experience and satisfaction in FY 2020. Finally, we identified changes SSA made in response to COVID-19 and their effect on telephone performance metrics and customer service as well as lessons SSA learned during COVID-19 related to telephone services.[7]

---

[4] See Appendix C for a timeline of SSA's COVID-19 operational changes.

[5] SSA, *Contact Social Security by Phone,* ssa.gov/agency/contact/phone (June 7, 2021).

[6] SSA OIG, *The Social Security Administration's Telephone Services (Congressional Response Report), A-05-20-50899* (May 2020). We issued this report following a prior request from Chair Larson.

[7] See Appendix B for our scope and methodology.

RESULTS OF REVIEW

In FY 2020, SSA received over 151 million calls at its field offices and the national 800-number. SSA handled over half of those calls through a combination of calls answered by SSA employees and addressed by automated services (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Calls to SSA in FY 2020
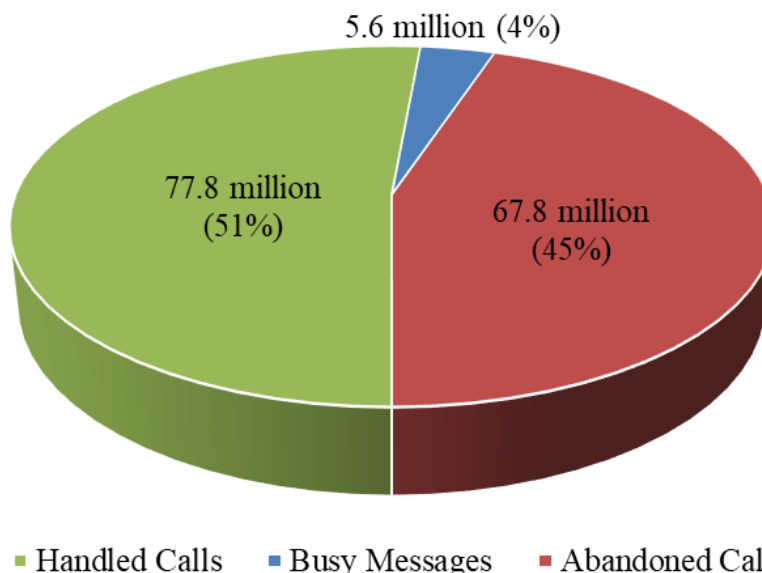
Note: Handled calls include field office and 800-number calls handled by employees and automated services. Abandoned calls include field office and 800-number calls abandoned any time during calls, including in menus and queues or when callers hear the greeting message, get an estimated wait time, or an offer to schedule a call back. See Appendix D for more information.

Calls Made to the Agency in Fiscal Year 2020

From October 2019 to March 2020, SSA's field offices received an average 4.6 million calls per month (see Figure 3 and Appendix D, Table D–1). The number of calls to field offices gradually increased beginning in March 2020 when SSA began limiting in-person field office visits in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Calls to field offices increased further in June 2020 when SSA shared field office general telephone numbers with the public. Between April and September 2020, field offices received an average 7.5 million calls per month. In March 2021, 1 year into the pandemic, field offices received over 12 million calls (see Appendix E).

From October 2019 to March 2020, the national 800-number received an average 7.3 million calls per month. The volume of calls to the national 800-number declined to an average 5.9 million calls per month from April to September 2020 as more people called local field offices.[8] According to SSA, part of the decline could also be attributed to lower busy rates on the national 800-number (see discussion of busy rates on page 6), which led to fewer repeat callers. In March 2021, the number of calls to the national 800-number had increased to approximately 7.1 million (see Appendix E).

Figure 3: Calls Made to the Field Offices and National 800-number (FY 2020)
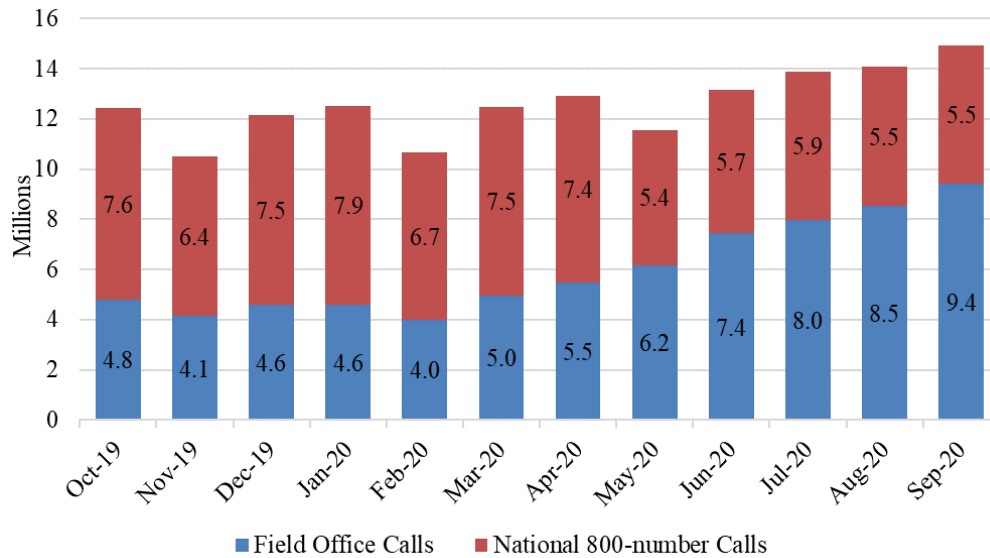
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

---

[8] According to SSA, national 800-number call volumes are normally higher from October through February each year, with the peak calling month often being January because more callers inquire about (1) changes in Medicare premiums or (2) applying for retirement benefits.

Calls Routed to Processing Centers

As SSA did with TSCs, it moved processing centers (PC) to a virtual environment in March 2020. Table 1 shows the number of national 800-number calls PC employees answered from October 2019 to March 2020. SSA stopped routing national 800-number calls to the PCs in April 2020 because PC employees' remote work equipment could not receive calls made to the national 800-number.[9] Additionally, SSA wanted PC employees to focus exclusively on processing PC workloads. SSA plans to resume PC assistance on the national 800-number when it transitions to a new telephone system.[10]

Table 1: Calls Answered by PC Employees
(FY 2020)

Date	Calls Answered by PCs	Percent of Total National 800-number Calls
October 2019	64,376	1%
November 2019	63,359	1%
December 2019	96,560	1%
January 2020	141,394	2%
February 2020	151,606	2%
March 2020	61,518	1%

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

---

[9] Before April 2020, TSCs received assistance from six regional SSA program service centers and its Office of Disability Operations, collectively referred to as PCs, when the call volume at SSA's national 800-number was high. PCs' main responsibilities are to issue payments, update beneficiary information, and resolve complex issues. The Office of Disability Operations' main responsibility is to process disability claims.

[10] We discuss the new telephone system later in this report. PC employees provided some assistance on the busiest call days in January and February 2021 using technology that allowed employees to take calls without remote work equipment.

Calls That Received Busy Messages

Calls to Field Offices

A busy message informs callers who want to speak to an employee that the system has reached capacity and asks them to call back later.[11] From October 2019 to March 2020, field office callers received on average 130,000 busy messages per month (see Figure 4 and Appendix D, Table D–2). After March 2020, when SSA limited in-person field office services and more employees were available to answer calls, the number of busy messages and busy rates at field offices were at their lowest. Between April and September 2020, field office callers received an average of 79,000 busy messages per month. As calls to field office increased toward the end of FY 2020, busy messages and rates also increased. In March 2021, busy messages at field offices had increased to almost 275,000 (see Appendix E).

Figure 4: Busy Rates for Calls to the Field Offices
(FY 2020)
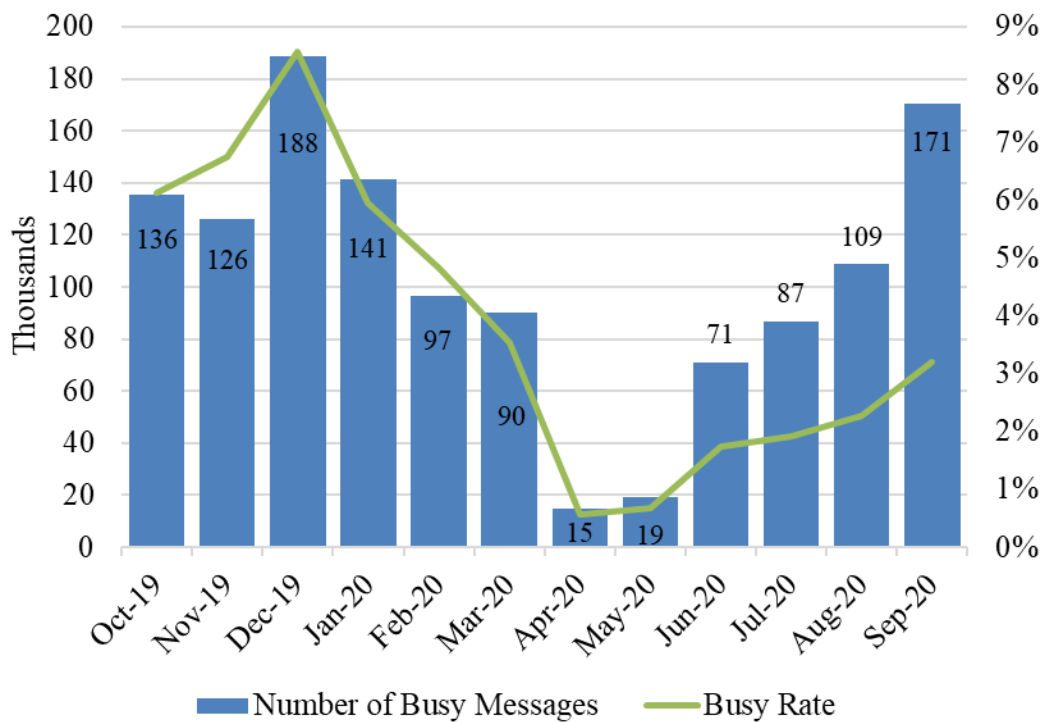
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

---

[11] Callers can only receive a busy message during business hours. Field office business hours are 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. local time, excluding weekends and Federal holidays. SSA did not change field office hours during the pandemic.

Calls to the National 800-number

From October 2019 to March 2020, the number of busy messages on the national 800-number averaged 577,000, with busy rates averaging 11.6 percent (see Figure 5 and Appendix D, Table D–3). Between April and September 2020, busy messages and busy rates for the national 800-number decreased to an average 48,000 and 1.2 percent, respectively, as SSA reduced operating hours and increased telephone queue capacity and staffing. Since callers can only receive a busy message during business hours, reduced hours account for a portion of the reduced number of callers who received a busy message. Before March 2020, business hours for the national 800-number were 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. local time, excluding weekends and Federal holidays.[12] Effective March 31, 2020, SSA temporarily changed the business hours to 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. local time and, on September 12, 2020, changed the hours to 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. local time. According to SSA, it began using two telephone platforms to support its teleworking employees. These two platforms had additional queue capacity, which allowed more callers to wait to be assisted and reduced the number of callers who received busy messages. SSA also hired 1,000 new TSC employees in FY 2020, making TSC staffing levels the highest in the previous 9 years. In March 2021, no callers to the national 800-number received a busy message (see Appendix E).

Figure 5: Busy Rates for Calls to the National 800-number (FY 2020)
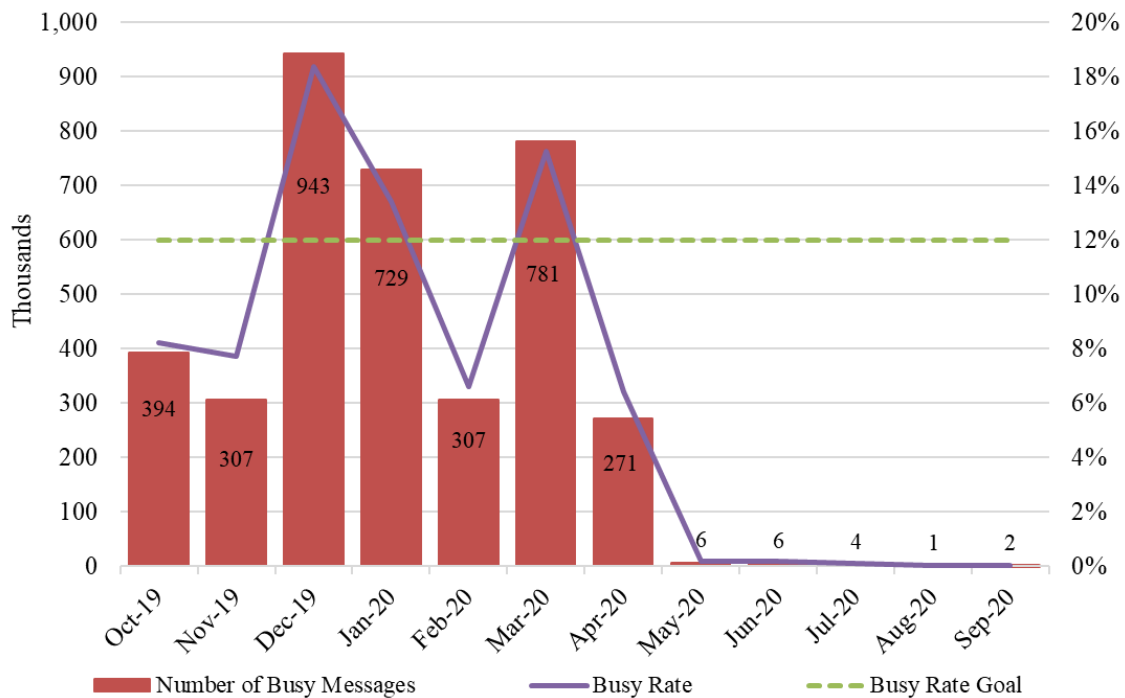
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

---

[12] This includes all time zones within the continental United States.

Calls Abandoned in Menus

Callers to the national 800-number abandon calls in menus when they hang up while using automated services. From October 2019 to March 2020, callers abandoned an average of 2.1 million calls to the national 800-number (see Figure 6 and Appendix D, Table D–4). Callers abandoned fewer calls in menus between April and September 2020, an average of 1.7 million calls per month, as callers used fewer automated services on the national 800-number. In March 2021, callers abandoned almost 1.7 million calls in menus (see Appendix E).

Figure 6: National 800-number Calls Abandoned in Menus
(FY 2020)
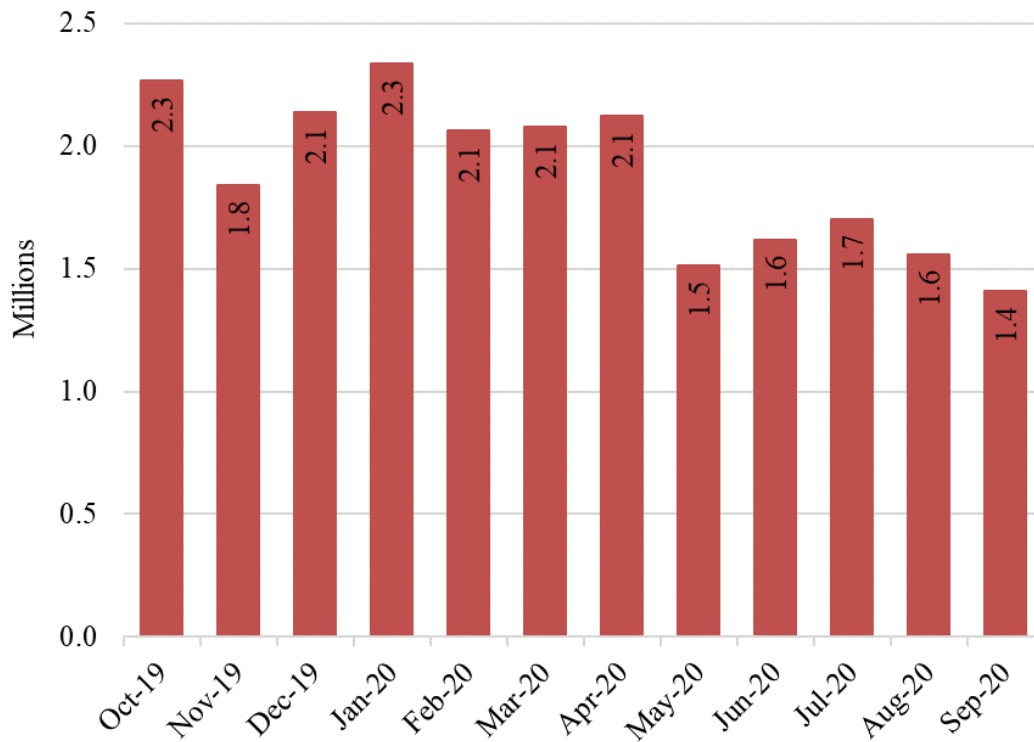
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Calls Abandoned in the Queue

From October 2019 to March 2020, an average 213,000 callers per month hung up while waiting to speak with field office employees (see Figure 7 and Appendix D, Table D–5). Between April and September 2020, field office callers abandoned an average 172,000 calls per month. The number of calls abandoned in queue increased toward the end of FY 2020 as field offices received more calls. In March 2021, approximately 741,000 field office calls were abandoned in queue (see Appendix E).

From October 2019 to March 2020, an average 1.2 million calls to the national 800-number were abandoned in queue each month (see Figure 7 and Appendix D, Table D–6). Beginning in April 2020, SSA equipped more TSC staff with the technology to answer calls remotely, and the national 800-number received fewer calls, which enabled the average number of calls abandoned in queue from April to September 2020 to remain consistent with pre-pandemic months. In March 2021, almost 1.7 million calls to the national 800-number were abandoned in queue (see Appendix E).

Figure 7: Field Office and National 800-number Calls Abandoned in Queue (FY 2020)
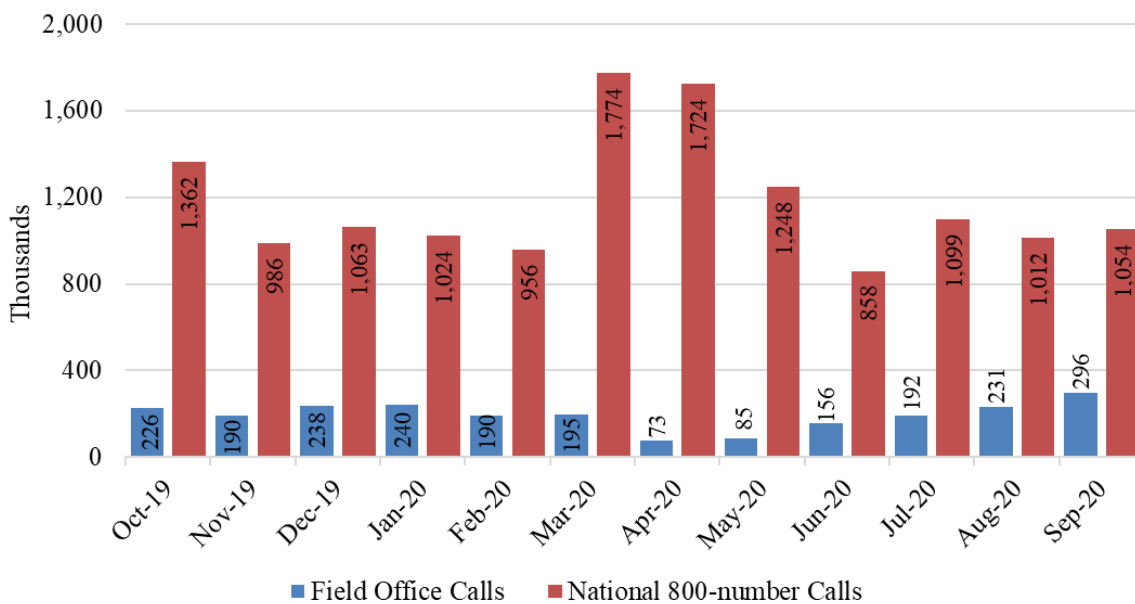
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Calls Handled by Employees

From October 2019 to March 2020, field office employees handled an average 1.8 million calls (see Figure 8 and Appendix D, Table D–5). Between April and September 2020, the average number of calls field office employees answered increased to 3.8 million per month, along with the number of calls to field offices. In March 2021, field office employees handled over 6 million calls (see Appendix E).

From October 2019 to March 2020, employees on the national 800-number handled an average 2.7 million calls per month (see Figure 8 and Appendix D, Table D–6). Between April and September 2020, calls handled by employees decreased to an average 2.4 million per month. In April 2020, SSA supplied more technology enabling TSC employees to answer calls remotely and began using two telephone platforms that increased capacity, leading the number of calls handled to return closer to pre-pandemic levels toward the end of FY 2020.[13] In March 2021, TSC employees handled approximately 3.1 million calls (see Appendix E).

Figure 8: Field Office and National 800-number Calls Handled by Employees FY 2020
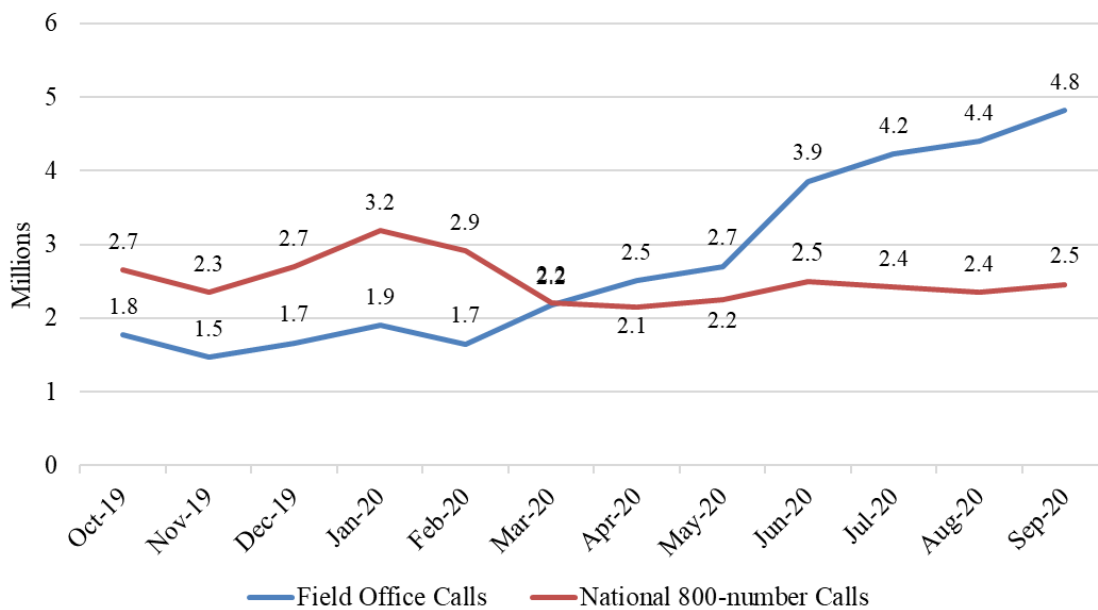
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

---

[13] For the national 800-number, calls handled includes callers who elected to receive a call back. If there is call capacity for callers requesting to speak to an employee, a recording provides the caller with the expected wait time and an option to receive a call back. According to SSA, its automated system generates the call back and connects the caller to an SSA employee when the caller answers.

Calls Handled by Automated Services

From October 2019 to March 2020, automated services[14] handled an average 417,000 calls per month. Between April and September 2020, the average calls handled by automated services decreased to 310,000 per month (see Figure 9 and Appendix D, Table D–7). SSA attributes fewer calls handled by automated services during the pandemic, in part, to fewer callers using the Field Office Locator menu option. Since SSA limited in-person service at field offices to certain dire-need situations, fewer callers inquired about field office locations. The percent of calls handled by automated services remained between 4 and 6 percent each month in FY 2020 because the total number of calls to the national 800-number declined along with the use of automated services. In March 2021, automated services handled approximately 353,000 calls or 5 percent of total calls to the national 800-number (see Appendix E).

Figure 9: National 800-number Calls Handled by Automated Services (FY 2020)
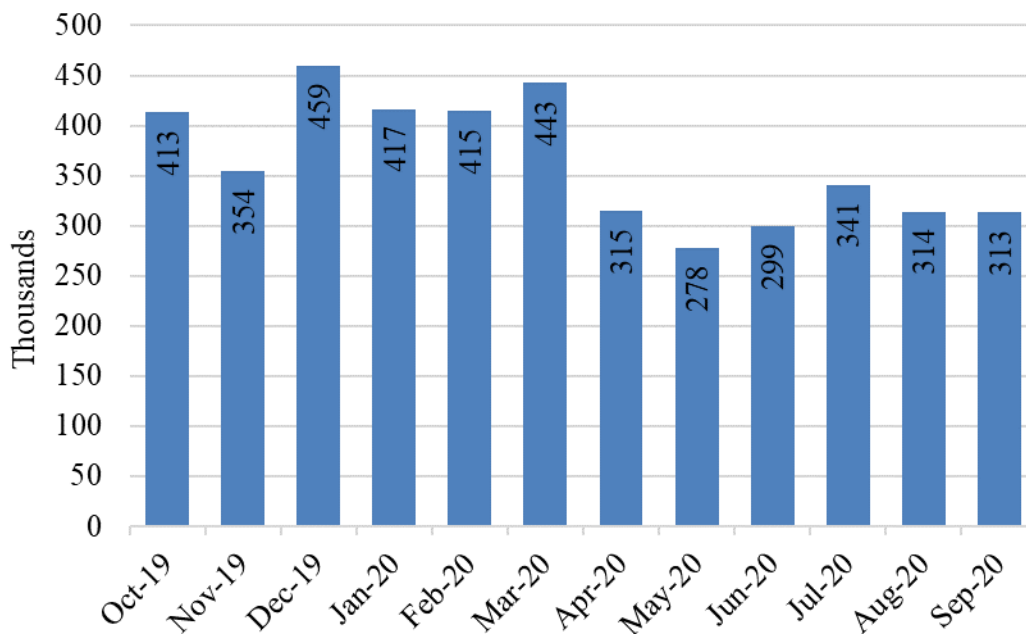
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

---

[14] SSA's automated services are available during or after business hours for calls to the national 800-number. According to SSA, callers to field offices are not presented with automated services.

Average Speed of Answer

Calls to Field Offices

The average speed of answer is the average amount of time calls wait in queue to be answered by an SSA employee. Wait time begins when a call is placed in queue and ends when an SSA employee answers the call. From October 2019 to March 2020, field offices' average speed of answer decreased but began increasing between April and September 2020, as calls to field offices increased (see Figure 10 and Appendix D, Table D–10). In March 2021, the average speed of answer increased to 3 minutes (see Appendix E).

**Figure 10: Field Office Average Speed of Calls Answered
(FY 2020)**
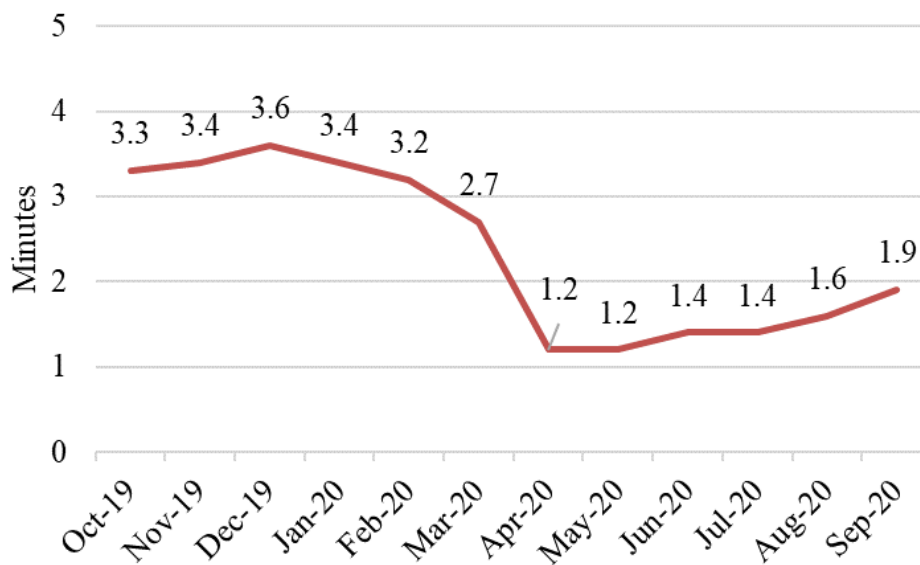
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Calls to the National 800-number

From October 2019 through February 2020 the average speed of answer on the national 800-number remained below 19 minutes. The average speed increased in March 2020 when SSA moved TSCs to a virtual environment but before all employees were equipped to answer calls remotely (see Figure 11 and Appendix D, Table D–10). After April 2020, when SSA provided TSC staff the necessary technology, the number of 800-number agents available to answer calls increased and improved the average speed of answer. According to SSA, the average speed of answer worsened toward the end of the FY in part because, in July 2020, it redirected fully trained employees from taking calls to training and mentoring new employees. In March 2021, the average speed of answer was 13.6 minutes, within SSA's 15-minute goal for FY 2021 (see Appendix E).

Figure 11: National 800-number Average Speed of Calls Answered (FY 2020)
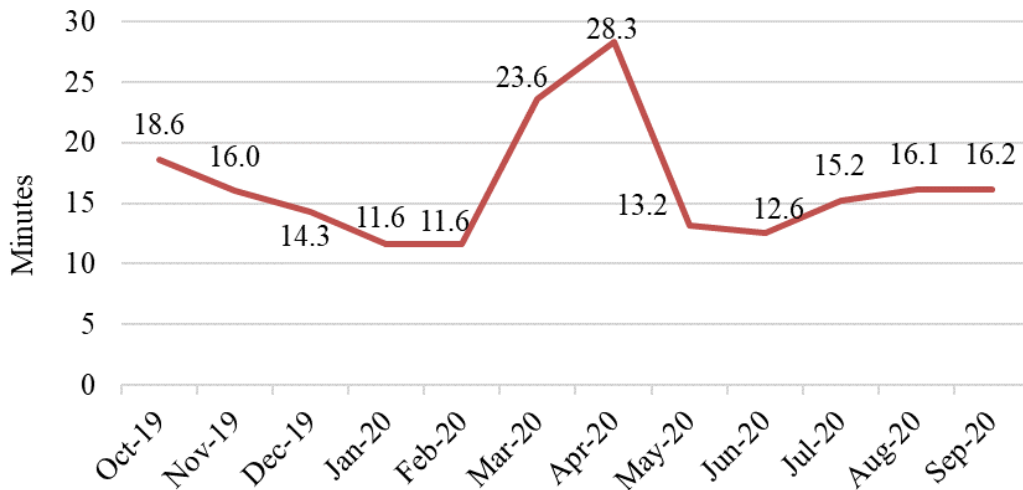
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

First-call Resolution

First-call resolution refers to calls where SSA resolved the customers' issues the first time they called. SSA only had information on first-call resolution for the national 800-number for October 2019 through March 2020 (see Table 2). Effective March 20, 2020, SSA discontinued the post-call surveys that provided first-call resolution information because the surveys did not interface with the system SSA was using to maintain the national 800-number remotely. Even before the pandemic began, SSA was not obtaining post-call survey information for calls to the field offices because it focused telephone performance measures on the national 800-number. As of November 2021, SSA still was not collecting post-call survey information from callers.

Table 2: First Call Resolution
(FY 2020)

Date	First Call Resolution
October 2019	81.7%
November 2019	81.7%
December 2019	81.6%
January 2020	81.6%
February 2020	83.1%
March 2020 (through March 20)	80.6%

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information

Calls Made to the Agency in Fiscal Years 2010 Through 2020

SSA's field offices received more calls in FY 2020 than any year since FY 2013 (see Figure 12 and Appendix F).[15] As such, there were fewer calls to the national 800-number in FY 2020 compared to the previous 2 years.

Figure 12: Calls Made to Field Offices and the National 800-number (FYs 2010 Through 2020)
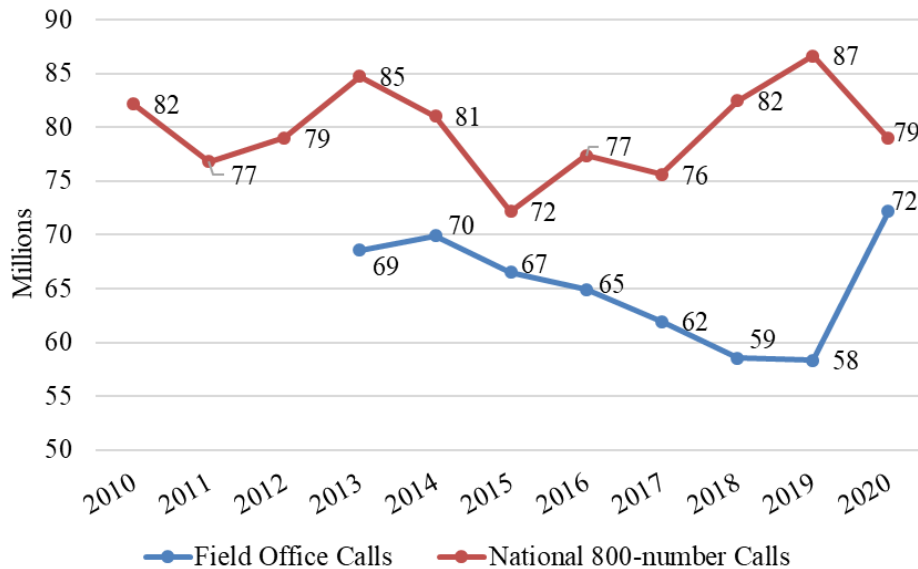
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information
Note: According to SSA, field office data for FYs 2010 through 2012 were unavailable.

---

[15] In FY 2013, SSA began using a uniform telephone system for field offices. Before FY 2013, each field office had an independent telephone system, and SSA stated it did not track calls to all field offices. Therefore, field office data for FYs 2010 through 2012 were unavailable.

Calls that Received Busy Messages

Fewer callers received busy messages in FY 2020 compared to prior years (see Figure 13, Appendix E, and Table F–3) because more staff was available to answer calls.

**Figure 13: Busy Messages and Rates for Field Office Calls
(FYs 2010 Through 2020)**
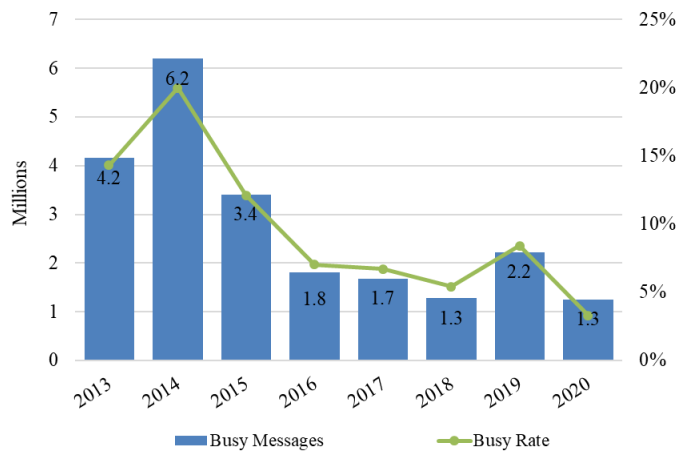
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

SSA used two telephone platforms that had additional capacity and enabled employees to answer national 800-number calls while teleworking. This allowed more callers to wait in a queue, which reduced busy messages and lowered busy rates in FY 2020 compared to previous years (see Figure 14 and Appendix F, Table F–3).

**Figure 14: Busy Messages and Rates for National 800-number Calls
(FYs 2010 Through 2020)**
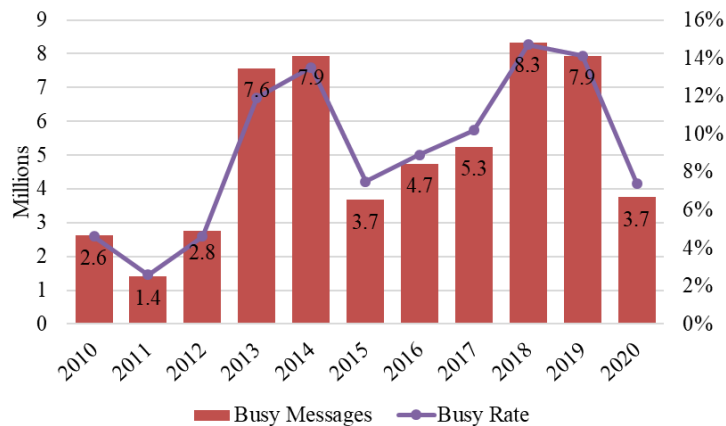
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Calls Abandoned in the Queue

Despite receiving more calls in FY 2020, field office calls abandoned in queue were slightly lower compared to previous years (see Figure 15 and Appendix F, Table F–5). With fewer calls to the national 800-number in FY 2020 compared to previous years, the number of calls abandoned in queue also declined.

Figure 15: Field Office and National 800-number Calls Abandoned in Queue (FYs 2010 Through 2020)
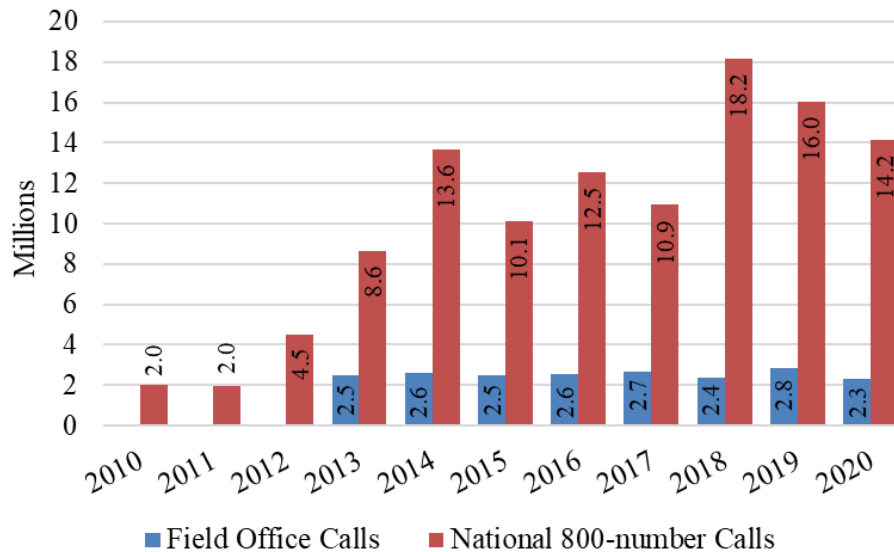
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Note: According to SSA, field office data for FYs 2010 through 2012 were unavailable.

Calls Handled by Employees

As shown in Figure 16 and Appendix F, Table F–6, field office calls handled by employees were at their highest level in FY 2020, over 10 million more calls than previous years, while national 800-number calls handled by employees remained relatively the same.

Figure 16: Field Office and National 800-number Calls Handled by Employees (FYs 2010 Through 2020)
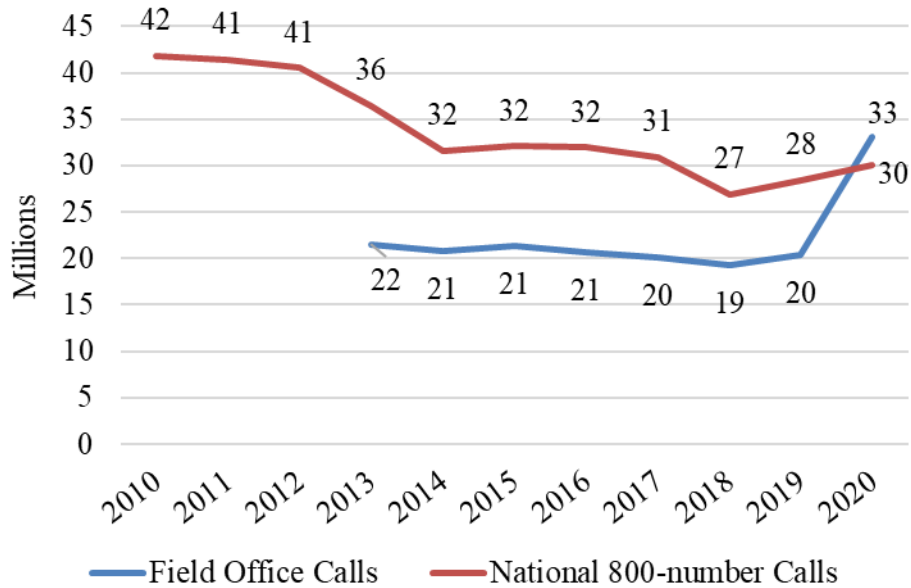
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.
Note: According to SSA, field office data for FYs 2010 through 2012 were unavailable.

Calls Handled by Automated Services

In FY 2020, fewer callers used automated services, compared to recent years (see Figure 17 and Appendix F, Table F–7), partly due to an overall reduction in call volume to the national 800-number and decreased caller use of the Field Office Locator menu option. SSA experienced declines in the use of automated service in FYs 2012 and 2013 when it transitioned to a different telephone service provider.

Figure 17: National 800-number Calls Handled by Automated Services (FYs 2010 Through 2020)
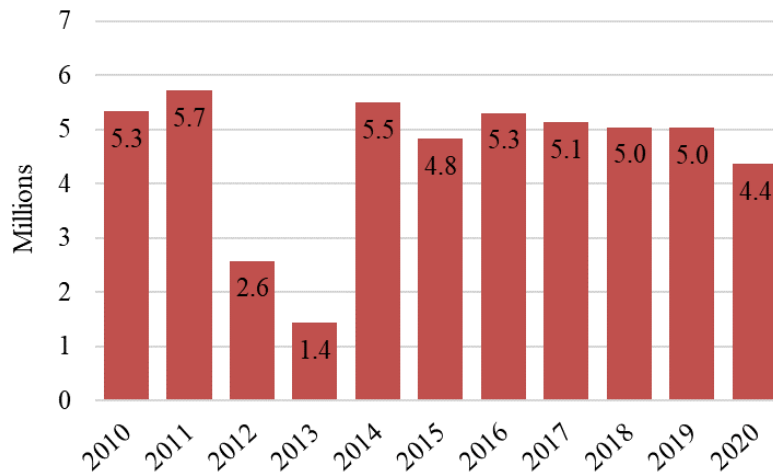
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Average Speed of Answer

In FY 2020, the average speed of answer for field office calls was lower than most previous years (see Figure 18 and Appendix F, Table F–8). By contrast, the average speed of answer for national 800-number calls was lower than the previous 2 years but higher than most other years.

Figure 18: Field Office and National 800-number Average Speed of Answer (Minutes) (FYs 2010 Through 2020)
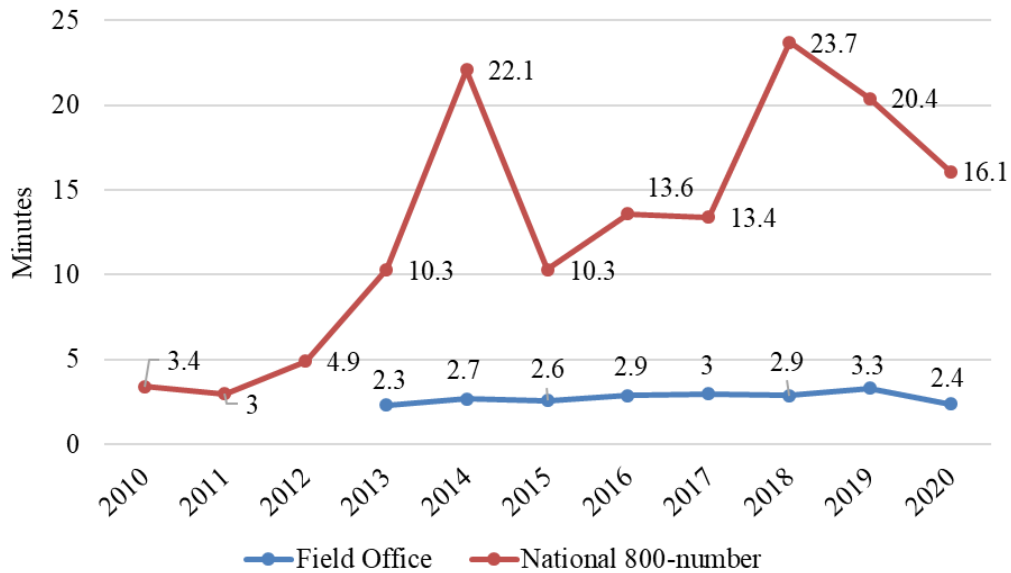
Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.
Note: According to SSA, field office data for FYs 2010 through 2012 were unavailable.

Performance Compared to Other Federal Agencies and Industry

To compare SSA's FY 2020 performance to other Federal agencies, we used information from 13 customer service call centers for 10 Federal agencies in FY 2020. Although not all of the Federal agencies we reviewed tracked the same telephone performance metrics, and SSA had a higher call volume in FY 2020 than any other customer service call center, SSA's performance was generally similar to, or better than, most other agencies' call centers. For example, in FY 2020, employees handled 42 percent of total calls to SSA's field offices and national 800-number, while employees handled a smaller percentage of calls at half of other Federal agencies' call centers (see Figure 19). Additionally, callers to SSA's field offices had shorter wait times than most other call centers, though the national 800-number had longer wait times than most call centers. See Appendix G for comparison of all agencies' data to SSA. In our previous report on telephone services, we discussed how SSA seemed to fare better than industry call centers in June 2020.[16]

Figure 19: Percent of Calls Handled by Employees by Agency
(FY 2020)
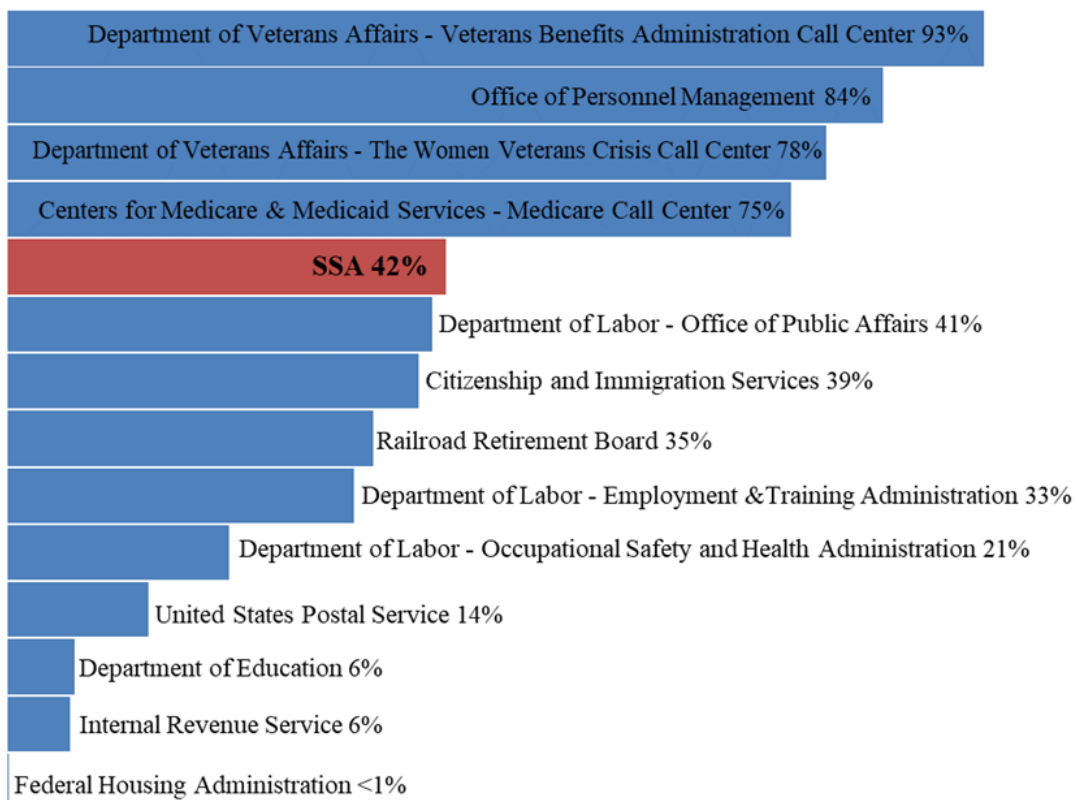
Operational Changes Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In our prior review, we reported on SSA's operational changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included SSA's efforts to equip employees with technology to answer calls remotely, share field office telephone numbers with the public, reduce the national 800-number hours, and suspend PC assistance to the national 800-number.[17] By shifting PC employees' focus from assisting the national 800-number, SSA addressed growing workloads at PCs. According to SSA, workloads in the PCs were at their highest point in January 2020 at over 5.1 million actions pending. By having PC employees focus exclusively on these actions, SSA reduced this to 3.7 million by the end of FY 2020. As of November 2021, SSA had not made additional operational changes for PCs and TSCs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agency Steps to Strengthen Telephone Services

In FY 2020, SSA hired 1,000 new employees in the TSCs despite hiring delays because of COVID-19. Additionally, to improve caller experience, SSA conducted a review, planned before COVID-19, of its Interactive Voice Response application and main menu options on the national 800-number. As a result of this review, SSA:

● removed the requirement that callers provide a confirmation number to obtain a claim status through automation, making it easier for callers to check their claim status;

● added the ability for callers who never received benefits from SSA to request a Benefit Verification Letter using automation; and

● offered callers an automated option to change an address.

New Telephone System

The Next Generation Telephony Project, which the Agency started before the COVID-19 pandemic, will combine the national 800-number, field office, and Headquarters telephone systems ". . . into one cohesive platform that will allow calls to be routed to the best source quickly." SSA decided to move forward on the unification during the pandemic because the platform used to answer calls remotely was intended to be a temporary solution and it had limitations that were not sustainable.

In May 2021, SSA attempted to move the two systems used for the national 800-number to the new, unified system. However, users were unable to log onto the new system because of capacity constraints that did not surface during preliminary testing. As a result, SSA reverted back to one of its older systems. According to the Agency, it took longer than expected to re-configure employees' computers to allow them to remotely answer calls, which prolonged the period before all staff could take calls. From May 14 to May 19, 2021, SSA answered less than 60 percent of calls to the national 800-number, and callers experienced wait times up to 48 minutes.[18]

---

[17] See Footnote 16.

[18] According to SSA, the service disruption did not affect calls to field offices.

To complete the unification, the Agency reported it worked with its vendors to develop a plan that accounts for continuing stable service and implementing technology changes to complete unification. SSA plans to phase users into the new system to ensure both systems can answer calls.

SSA attempted to unify the telephone system again in September 2021; however, only about half of the migration was successful. The telephone system remains partly on the older system and partly on the unified system in a limited capacity. On November 10, 2021, SSA re-started the unification process and is incrementally moving employees to the unified platform (see Appendix H).

Post-call Surveys

Effective March 20, 2020, SSA turned off the post-call surveys it used to collect information about callers' experience and satisfaction because the surveys were not supported by the telephone system SSA deployed to maintain the national 800-number service while employees teleworked. According to SSA, it will re-activate the post-call surveys when it transitions to the new telephone system. In the interim, SSA's Office of Quality Review hired a private contractor to survey randomly sampled callers, from March 2021 to January 2022, regarding their opinions on the service they received during calls to SSA's national 800-number.[19] As of November 2021, SSA's private contractor had conducted approximately 10,000 surveys. Preliminary monthly results from March 2021 through July 2021 indicated overall customer satisfaction with service between 68 and 76 percent. These percentages are based on the number of customers who rated the level of service with a rating of either (1) excellent, (2) very good, or (3) good.

---

[19] SSA, Administrative Message AM-21006, *Notification of 800 Number Caller Recontact Survey to Begin – March 2021*, February 23, 2021.

Lessons Learned

According to SSA, during the pandemic, the Agency learned the importance of building contingency plans for emergencies where there is no access to traditional workspaces. Further, SSA's Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Systems and Deputy Chief Information Officer for Information Technology Operations acknowledged that the Agency needs ". . . to create flexibility for remote work at our [TSCs] to ensure continuous communication and service to the public."[20] SSA plans to build on its virtual service strategy, including its planned new telephone system. The new system will enable the Agency to route calls to any field office or TSC employee in any location to answer calls and reduce waiting times. As part of the new system, SSA plans to enhance the automated options on the national 800-number with better voice recognition, which will improve the caller experience and increase the number of calls handled by these automated services.

Michelle L. Anderson
Assistant Inspector General for Audit

---

[20] *Modernizing Federal Telework: Moving Forward Using the Lessons Learned During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Before the Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management,* 116th Congress p.3 (2020).

APPENDICES

Appendix A – CONGRESSIONAL REQUEST LETTER

JOHN B. LARSON
CONNECTICUT,
CHAIRMAN

BILL PASCRELL JR., NEW JERSEY
LINDA T. SANCHEZ, CALIFORNIA
DAN KILDEE, MICHIGAN
BRENDAN BOYLE, PENNSYLVANIA
BRAD SCHNEIDER, ILLINOIS
BRIAN HIGGINS, NEW YORK

KATHRYN OLSON,
STAFF DIRECTOR

Congress of the United States

U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY

1102 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
(202) 225- 3625

Washington, D.C 20515-0348

http://waysandmeans.house.gov

TOM REED
NEW YORK,
RANKING MEMBER

JODEY ARRINGTON, TEXAS
DREW FERGUSON, GEORGIA
RON ESTES, KANSAS

AMY SHUART,
STAFF DIRECTOR

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Gail S. Ennis
Inspector General
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Inspector General Ennis:

Thank you for the Office of the Inspector General's (OIG's) recent congressional response report, "The Social Security Administration's Telephone Services." The OIG completed this report at Chairman Larson's request, to examine access and wait times for people seeking assistance and problem resolution through the Social Security Administration's (SSA's) telephone services.

We write to ask that the OIG expand on this important report, by reviewing SSA's telephone services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As highlighted in the OIG's recent report, even before the current crisis the public relied heavily on SSA's telephone services, but often could not access timely information or assistance. In fiscal year 2019, SSA's national 1-800 number and field offices received over 145 million calls – but handled fewer than 2 in 5 of these calls. Callers who did not get a busy signal or give up while on hold waited to speak with an SSA employee for an average of 20 minutes on the 1-800 number and 3 minutes at field offices.

We are particularly concerned about the impact of these substantial barriers and delays on the American people's ability to get their Social Security questions answered and problems solved during the COVID-19 crisis. To protect the health and safety of the public and SSA employees during the pandemic, SSA's Commissioner has appropriately closed SSA field offices to the public, except in certain very limited circumstances. As a result, the telephone is now the primary option for members of the public who need to interact with SSA employees.

Given the critical importance of ensuring strong service to the American people across SSA's telephone services, we are requesting two reports that answer the following questions:

Letter to Inspector General Ennis
July 21, 2020
Page 2

1. **Telephone service during COVID-19: A one-month snapshot**
   a. For the month of June 2020:
      i. How many calls were made to SSA's national 1-800 number; how many were made, in aggregate, to field offices?
      ii. For 1-800-service and local field office telephone service, separately:
         1. How many calls were routed to Program Service Centers?
         2. How many calls: got a busy signal, were abandoned in menus, were abandoned in the queue, were handled by agents, or were handled by automated services?
         3. What was the average speed of answer?
         4. What percent of customers were able to resolve their issue on the first call, with no follow-up required?
   b. How does SSA's performance on these metrics during June compare to SSA's pre-pandemic performance?
   c. How does SSA's performance on these metrics during June compare to the performance of other government agencies and industry during the pandemic, if available?
   d. How have changes in SSA workloads, staffing, or other factors, made due to the COVID-19 pandemic, affected SSA's ability to ensure that the 1-800 number and field offices are able assist callers in a timely manner, and that the Program Service Centers are able to achieve priority and critical workloads?

2. **Telephone service during COVID-19: A review of fiscal year 2020**
   a. In fiscal year 2020:
      i. How many calls were made to SSA's national 1-800 number; how many were made, in aggregate, to field offices?
      ii. For 1-800-service and local field office telephone service, separately:
         1. How many calls were routed to Program Service Centers?
         2. How many calls: got a busy signal, were abandoned in menus, were abandoned in the queue, were handled by agents, or were handled by automated services?
         3. What was the average speed of answer?
         4. What percent of customers were able to resolve their issue on the first call, with no follow-up required?
      iii. How did these metrics differ for the months before and after SSA implemented agencywide service delivery changes and maximized telework due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
   b. How do the fiscal year 2020 metrics compare to SSA's experience and performance for fiscal years 2010 through 2019, and to typical government and industry benchmarks? Please discuss these comparisons separately for the months before and after SSA implemented agencywide service delivery changes and maximized telework due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
   c. In fiscal year 2020, how did changes in SSA workloads, staffing, or other factors, made due to the COVID-19 pandemic, affect SSA's ability to ensure that the 1-
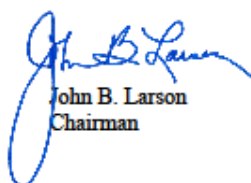
800 number and field offices were able assist callers in a timely manner, and that the Program Service Centers were able to achieve priority and critical workloads?

d. What steps did SSA take in fiscal year 2020 to strengthen its telephone services and to better track and evaluate callers' experience and satisfaction?

e. Has SSA identified any lessons learned related to new or existing workloads that will remain available to optimize timeliness, customer satisfaction, and effectiveness of telephone services?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,

John B. Larson
Chairman

Tom Reed
Republican Leader

Appendix B – SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

To achieve our objective, we:

- Reviewed the Social Security Administration's (SSA) policies and procedures.
- Obtained and summarized SSA's Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 performance data and customer service management information for national 800-number and field office telephone calls for the
  - total number of calls,
  - number of calls that got a busy message,
  - number of calls to abandoned in queue,
  - number of calls handled by SSA employees, and
  - average speed of answer for calls.
- Obtained and summarized SSA's FY 2020 performance data and customer service management information for national 800-number calls that were
  - routed to the program service centers
  - handled by automated services, and
  - abandoned in menus.
- Obtained March 2021 performance data for national 800-number and field office telephone calls.
- Compared SSA's FY 2020 performance to data from FYs 2010 through 2019 we obtained during our review of the Social Security Administration's Telephone Services (Congressional Response Report), A-05-20-50899 (May 2020).
- Identified changes in staffing and workloads in FY 2020, steps SSA took to strengthen telephone services and better track and evaluate callers' experience and satisfaction, and changes SSA made in response to COVID-19 and evaluated their effect on performance/customer service.
- Obtained information on any lessons SSA learned related to new or existing workloads during COVID-19.
- Obtained telephone customer service data from the following Federal agencies and compared the data to SSA's FY 2020 telephone services' performance.
  - Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services – Medicare Call Center
  - Citizenship and Immigration Services
  - Department of Education
  - Department of Labor
    - Employment & Training Administration
    - Occupational Safety and Health Administration
    - Office of Public Affairs
  - Department of Veterans Affairs

- o Women Veterans Crisis Call Center
- o Veterans Benefits Administration Call Center
- o Federal Housing Administration
- o Internal Revenue Service
- o Office of Personnel Management
- o Railroad Retirement Board
- o U.S. Postal Service

We conducted our review between November 2020 and August 2021 in Chicago, Illinois. The principal entity reviewed was SSA's Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Operations.

SSA collects the data on telephone calls electronically through its Office of Customer Service, and we limited our analysis to the data SSA provided. Based on the information we obtained from SSA and documentation we reviewed, we determined the data we used were sufficiently reliable given our objectives and the intended use of the data should not lead to incorrect or unintentional conclusions.

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 two Components and four Principles as significant to the audit objective.

- Component 1: Control Environment

  - o Principle 2: Exercise oversight and responsibility

  - o Principle 3: Establish structure, responsibility, and authority

- Component 5: Monitoring

  - o Principle 16: Perform monitoring activities

  - o Principle 17: Remediate Deficiencies

We conducted this 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 C – TIMELINE OF THE AGENCY'S COVID-19 OPERATIONAL CHANGES

March 17, 2020
Limited in-person field office service to appointment only for dire need situations and moved teleservice centers (TSC) to a virtual environment.

March 20, 2020
Turned off post-call surveys for the national 800-number.

March 31, 2020
Began equipping TSC staff with the technology to answer calls remotely and reduced hours on the national 800-number to 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. local time.

April 20, 2020
Increased the number of TSC staff with technology to answer calls remotely.

April 2020
Cancelled processing center assistance on the national 800-number.

June 2020
Shared field office general telephone numbers with the public so employees could provide telephone service at the local level.

September 12, 2020
Changed national 800-number operating hours to 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. local time.

Appendix D – TELEPHONE PERFORMANCE DATA - FISCAL YEAR 2020

Table D–1: Calls to the Agency

Date	Field Office Calls	National 800-number Calls	Total Calls
October 2019	4,809,630	7,613,667	12,423,297
November 2019	4,140,030	6,351,132	10,491,162
December 2019	4,606,828	7,531,537	12,138,365
January 2020	4,613,254	7,903,547	12,516,801
February 2020	3,996,327	6,659,665	10,655,992
March 2020	4,969,135	7,503,044	12,472,179
Pre-pandemic Average (October 2019 through March 2020)	**4,522,534**	**7,260,432**	**11,782,966**
April 2020	5,497,049	7,427,406	12,924,455
May 2020	6,183,039	5,384,222	11,567,261
June 2020	7,441,327	5,706,694	13,148,021
July 2020	7,988,782	5,872,720	13,861,502
August 2020	8,549,192	5,518,012	14,067,204
September 2020	9,402,169	5,529,555	14,931,724
Pandemic Average (April through September 2020)	**7,510,260**	**5,906,435**	**13,416,695**
FY 2020 Total	**72,196,762**	**79,001,201**	**151,197,963**

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information. OIG calculated averages.

Table D–2: Busy Messages and Busy Rates for Field Office Calls

Date	Total Busy Messages	Busy Rate
October 2019	135,677	6.1%
November 2019	126,194	6.8%
December 2019	188,489	8.6%
January 2020	141,364	6.0%
February 2020	96,750	4.8%
March 2020	90,256	3.5%
Pre-pandemic Average (October 2019 through March 2020)	**129,788**	**6.0%**
April 2020	14,979	0.6%
May 2020	19,226	0.7%
June 2020	71,113	1.7%
July 2020	86,783	1.9%

Date	Total Busy Messages	Busy Rate
August 2020	108,757	2.3%
September 2020	170,617	3.2%
Pandemic Average (April through September 2020)	**78,579**	**1.7%**
FY 2020 Total	**1,250,205**	**3.3%**

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information. OIG calculated averages.

Table D–3: Busy Messages and Busy Rates for National 800-number Calls

Date	Total Busy Messages	Busy Rate
October 2019	393,674	8.2%
November 2019	306,900	7.7%
December 2019	942,964	18.4%
January 2020	728,758	13.4%
February 2020	307,024	6.6%
March 2020	780,624	15.3%
Pre-pandemic Average (October 2019 through March 2020)	**576,657**	**11.6%**
April 2020	271,414	6.4%
May 2020	6,313	0.2%
June 2020	6,083	0.2%
July 2020	3,639	0.1%
August 2020	726	0.0%
September 2020	1,879	0.1%
Pandemic Average (April through September 2020)	**48,342**	**1.2%**
FY 2020 Total	**3,749,998**	**7.4%**

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information. OIG calculated averages.

Table D–4: National 800-number Calls Abandoned in Menus

Date	Number of Calls Abandoned in Menus	Total Calls to the National 800-number (see Table D–1)	Percent of Calls Abandoned in Menus
October 2019	2,267,561	7,613,667	30%
November 2019	1,841,341	6,351,132	29%
December 2019	2,138,305	7,531,537	28%
January 2020	2,337,405	7,903,547	30%
February 2020	2,062,384	6,659,665	31%
March 2020	2,078,562	7,503,044	28%
Pre-pandemic Average (October 2019 through March 2020)	**2,120,926**	**7,260,432**	**29%**
April 2020	2,120,986	7,427,406	29%
May 2020	1,513,372	5,384,222	28%
June 2020	1,618,203	5,706,694	28%
July 2020	1,699,664	5,872,720	29%
August 2020	1,555,872	5,518,012	28%
September 2020	1,409,657	5,529,555	25%
Pandemic Average (April through September 2020)	**1,652,959**	**5,906,435**	**28%**
FY 2020 Total	**22,643,312**	**79,001,201**	**29%**

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information. OIG calculated averages.

Table D–5: Field Office Calls Routed to Employees, Abandoned in Queue, and Handled by Employees

Date	Total Calls Routed to Employees	Calls Abandoned in Queue	Percent of Calls Abandoned in Queue	Calls Handled by Employees	Percent of Calls Handled by Employees
October 2019	2,216,175	226,401	10%	1,772,140	80%
November 2019	1,869,540	189,592	10%	1,471,935	79%
December 2019	2,202,302	237,780	11%	1,665,015	76%
January 2020	2,374,789	240,405	10%	1,902,634	80%
February 2020	2,005,964	190,104	9%	1,652,434	82%
March 2020	2,551,304	194,640	8%	2,177,710	85%
Pre-pandemic Average (October 2019 through March 2020)	**2,203,346**	**213,154**	**10%**	**1,773,645**	**80%**
April 2020	2,608,765	73,482	3%	2,508,311	96%
May 2020	2,817,778	85,232	3%	2,705,621	96%
June 2020	4,103,192	155,579	4%	3,861,706	94%
July 2020	4,529,986	191,961	4%	4,230,822	93%
August 2020	4,764,113	230,763	5%	4,399,206	92%
September 2020	5,327,050	296,000	6%	4,818,281	90%
Pandemic Average (April through September 2020)	**4,025,147**	**172,170**	**4%**	**3,753,991**	**94%**
FY 2020 Total	**37,370,958**	**2,311,939**	**7%**	**33,165,815**	**87%**

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information. OIG calculated averages.

Table D–6: National 800-number Calls Routed to Employees, Abandoned in Queue, and Handled by Employees

Date	Total Calls Routed to Employees	Calls Abandoned in Queue	Percent of Calls Abandoned in Queue	Calls Handled by Employees	Percent of Calls Handled by Employees
October 2019	4,776,116	1,362,106	29%	2,653,529	56%
November 2019	3,973,435	986,136	25%	2,347,975	59%
December 2019	5,126,113	1,063,283	21%	2,699,134	53%
January 2020	5,423,735	1,023,951	19%	3,191,003	59%
February 2020	4,632,563	956,214	21%	2,910,390	63%
March 2020	5,115,773	1,774,014	35%	2,203,313	43%
Pre-pandemic Average (October 2019 through March 2020)	**4,841,289**	**1,194,284**	**25%**	**2,667,557**	**55%**
April 2020	4,220,733	1,723,905	41%	2,144,748	51%
May 2020	3,171,126	1,248,088	39%	2,247,401	71%
June 2020	3,440,857	857,892	25%	2,493,330	72%
July 2020	3,586,552	1,099,238	31%	2,418,587	67%
August 2020	3,426,994	1,012,377	30%	2,352,939	69%
September 2020	3,593,047	1,053,534	30%	2,456,653	68%
Pandemic Average (April through September 2020)	**3,573,218**	**1,165,839**	**32%**	**2,352,276**	**66%**
FY 2020 Total	**50,487,044**	**14,160,738**	**29%**	**30,119,002**	**61%**

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information. OIG calculated averages.

**Table D–7: National 800-number Calls Handled
by Automated Services**

Date	Calls Handled by Automated Services	Total Calls to the National 800-number	Percent of Calls Handled by Automated Services
October 2019	412,985	7,613,667	5%
November 2019	354,134	6,351,132	6%
December 2019	459,253	7,531,537	6%
January 2020	416,519	7,903,547	5%
February 2020	414,972	6,659,665	6%
March 2020	442,523	7,503,044	6%
Pre-pandemic Average (October 2019 through March 2020)	**416,731**	**7,260,432**	**6%**
April 2020	315,122	7,427,406	4%
May 2020	277,865	5,384,222	5%
June 2020	299,473	5,706,694	5%
July 2020	340,912	5,872,720	6%
August 2020	314,131	5,518,012	6%
September 2020	313,241	5,529,555	6%
Pandemic Average (April through September 2020)	**310,124**	**5,906,435**	**5%**
FY 2020 Total	**4,361,130**	**79,001,201**	**6%**

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information. OIG calculated averages.

Table D–8: Additional Field Office Calls

Date	Callers that Selected Main Menu Options	Callers that Hung up Before Entering Queue	Overflow Calls
October 2019	2,584,434	9,021	81,817
November 2019	2,265,431	5,059	81,061
December 2019	2,400,970	3,556	110,313
January 2020	2,236,807	1,658	90,172
February 2020	1,990,285	78	66,622
March 2020	2,416,753	1,078	88,370
Pre-pandemic Average (October 2019 through March 2020)	**2,315,780**	**3,408**	**86,393**
April 2020	2,833,587	54,697	11,878
May 2020	3,038,724	326,537	7,614
June 2020	3,292,404	45,731	14,512
July 2020	3,455,074	3,722	19,995
August 2020	3,761,111	23,968	24,812
September 2020	3,997,537	77,582	38,657
Pandemic Average (April through September 2020)	**3,396,406**	**88,706**	**19,578**
FY 2020 Total	**34,273,117**	**552,687**	**635,823**

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information. OIG calculated averages.

Notes: Examples of field office main menu options include listening to hours and directions, dialing an employee by extension or name, or hanging up while in the main menu. The Callers that Hung up Before Entering Queue category includes callers who selected to speak to a field office employee but hung up before entering the queue. SSA defines overflow as calls that the field offices route to a designated group of employees when calls have exceeded maximum queue time or when no employees are available to take calls during business hours.

Table D–9: Other National 800-number Calls Abandoned

Date	Total Calls Abandoned
October 2019	523,812
November 2019	514,646
December 2019	228,598
January 2020	205,911
February 2020	8,681
March 2020	224,008
Pre-pandemic Average (October 2019 through March 2020)	**284,276**
April 2020	851,231
May 2020	91,183
June 2020	431,713
July 2020	310,680
August 2020	281,967
September 2020	294,591
Pandemic Average (April through September 2020)	**376,894**
FY 2020 Total	**3,967,021**

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information. OIG calculated averages.

Note: This category includes calls abandoned when callers hear the greeting message, an estimated wait time, or an offer to schedule a call back.

Table D–10: Field Office and National 800-number Average Speed of Calls Answered

Date	Field Office Average Speed of Answer (Minutes)	National 800-number Average Speed of Answer (Minutes)
October 2019	3.3	18.6
November 2019	3.4	16.0
December 2019	3.6	14.3
January 2020	3.4	11.6
February 2020	3.2	11.6
March 2020	2.7	23.6
Pre-pandemic Average (October 2019 through March 2020)	**3.3**	**16.0**
April 2020	1.2	28.3
May 2020	1.2	13.2
June 2020	1.4	12.6
July 2020	1.4	15.2
August 2020	1.6	16.1
September 2020	1.9	16.2
Pandemic Average (April through September 2020)	**1.5**	**16.9**
FY 2020 Average	**2.4**	**16.1**

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information. OIG calculated averages.

Appendix E – TELEPHONE PERFORMANCE DATA - MARCH 2021

Table E–1: Field Office Telephone Service Metrics

Metric	March 2021
Field Office Total Calls	12,503,391
Total Busy Messages	274,481
Busy Rate	3.8%
Calls Abandoned in Queue	741,370
Calls Handled by Employees	6,026,375
Percent of Calls Handled by Employees	84%
Callers that Selected Main Menu Options	4,953,117
Callers that Hung up Before Entering Queue	368,306
Overflow Calls	136,293
Field Office Average Speed of Answer	3.0 minutes

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Table E–2: National 800-Number Telephone Service Metrics

Metric	March 2021
National 800-Number Total Calls	7,149,242
Total Busy Messages	0
Busy Rate	0%
Calls Abandoned in Menus	1,684,406
Calls Abandoned in Queue	1,668,496
Calls Handled by Employees	3,108,230
Percent of Calls Handled by Employees	64%
Calls Handled by Automated Services	353,331
Percent of Calls Handled by Automated Services	5%
Other Calls Abandoned	Not Available
National 800-Number Average Speed of Answer	13.6 minutes

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Appendix F – TELEPHONE PERFORMANCE DATA - FISCAL YEARS 2010 THROUGH 2020

Table F–1: Calls to the Agency[1]

Fiscal Year	Field Office Calls	National 800-number Calls	Total Calls
2010	Unavailable	82,158,331	Unavailable
2011	Unavailable	76,832,488	Unavailable
2012	Unavailable	79,005,502	Unavailable
2013	68,541,232	84,720,116	153,261,348
2014	69,906,474	81,037,852	150,944,326
2015	66,503,694	72,162,874	138,666,568
2016	64,923,950	77,398,759	142,322,709
2017	61,962,611	75,614,873	137,577,484
2018	58,558,680	82,471,547	141,030,227
2019	58,339,021	86,643,832	144,982,853
2020	72,196,762	79,001,201	151,197,963

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Note: According to SSA, before FY 2013, each field office had an independent telephone system and did not track calls to all field offices.

Table F–2: Busy Messages for Field Office and National 800-number Calls

Fiscal Year	Field Office Calls	National 800-number Calls
2010	Unavailable	2,617,370
2011	Unavailable	1,409,205
2012	Unavailable	2,758,605
2013	4,152,700	7,566,164
2014	6,196,449	7,943,167
2015	3,411,538	3,674,402
2016	1,800,209	4,743,738
2017	1,679,692	5,250,976
2018	1,278,617	8,316,351
2019	2,223,393	7,930,947
2020	1,250,205	3,749,998

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Note: According to SSA, field office data for FYs 2010 through 2012 were not available.

---

[1] For FYs 2010 through 2019, we did not obtain data for additional field offices calls or other national 800-number calls abandoned. See Appendix D, Table D–8andTable D–9, respectively, for FY 2020 data in these categories.

Table F–3: Field Office and National 800-number Busy Rates

Fiscal Year	Field Office Calls	National 800-number Calls
2010	Unavailable	4.6%
2011	Unavailable	2.6%
2012	Unavailable	4.6%
2013	14.3%	11.9%
2014	20.0%	13.5%
2015	12.1%	7.5%
2016	7.0%	8.9%
2017	6.7%	10.2%
2018	5.4%	14.7%
2019	8.4%	14.1%
2020	3.3%	7.4%

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Note: According to SSA, field office data for FYs 2010 through 2012 were not available.

Table F–4: National 800-number Calls Abandoned in Menus

Fiscal Year	Number of Calls
2010	2,690,610
2011	2,795,092
2012	2,726,080
2013	1,688,402
2014	22,333,962
2015	22,680,335
2016	22,874,037
2017	23,389,216
2018	24,073,015
2019	29,203,129
2020	154,453,878

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Table F–5: Field Office and National 800-number Calls Abandoned in Queue

Fiscal Year	Field Office Calls	National 800-number Calls	Total Calls
2010	Unavailable	2,027,123	Unavailable
2011	Unavailable	1,965,619	Unavailable
2012	Unavailable	4,529,302	Unavailable
2013	2,500,603	8,633,161	11,133,764
2014	2,638,676	13,648,605	16,287,281
2015	2,506,650	10,131,616	12,638,266
2016	2,559,029	12,544,935	15,103,964
2017	2,658,133	10,920,693	13,578,826
2018	2,375,844	18,171,216	20,547,060
2019	2,826,449	16,013,241	18,839,690
2020	2,311,939	14,160,738	16,472,677

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Note: According to SSA, field office data for FYs 2010 through 2012 were not available.

Table F–6: Field Office and National 800-number Calls Handled by Employees

Fiscal Year	Field Office Calls	National 800-number Calls	Total Calls
2010	Unavailable	41,860,834	Unavailable
2011	Unavailable	41,375,015	Unavailable
2012	Unavailable	40,520,364	Unavailable
2013	21,559,595	36,411,466	57,971,061
2014	20,807,071	31,611,486	52,418,557
2015	21,322,995	32,075,315	53,398,310
2016	20,714,949	31,930,606	52,645,555
2017	20,145,765	30,919,908	51,065,673
2018	19,272,735	26,876,099	46,148,834
2019	20,362,236	28,464,527	48,826,763
2020	33,165,815	30,119,002	63,284,817

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Note: According to SSA, field office data for FYs 2010 through 2012 were not available.

Table F–7: National 800-number Calls Handled by Automation

Fiscal Year	Number of Calls
2010	5,337,137
2011	5,721,161
2012	2,572,949
2013	1,432,078
2014	5,497,592
2015	4,825,326
2016	5,300,958
2017	5,134,080
2018	5,034,866
2019	5,031,988
2020	4,361,130

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Table F–8: Field Office and National 800-number Average Speed of Calls Answered

Fiscal Year	Field Office Average Speed of Answer (Minutes)	National 800-number Average Speed of Answer (Minutes)
2010	Unavailable	3.4
2011	Unavailable	3.0
2012	Unavailable	4.9
2013	2.3	10.3
2014	2.7	22.1
2015	2.6	10.3
2016	2.9	13.6
2017	3.0	13.4
2018	2.9	23.7
2019	3.3	20.4
2020	2.4	16.1

Source: SSA, Office of Customer Service, management information.

Note: According to SSA, field office data for FYs 2010 through 2012 were not available.

Appendix G – FEDERAL AGENCY TELEPHONE PERFORMANCE DATA FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020

We obtained performance metrics for 13 customer service call centers at 10 Federal agencies (see Appendix B) and compared them to the Social Security Administration's telephone performance metrics in Fiscal Year 2020.

Table G–1: Number of Calls by Agency

Agency	FY 2020
Social Security Administration (see Appendix D, Table D–1)	**151,197,963**
U.S. Postal Service	100,480,906
Internal Revenue Service	66,175,660
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services – Medicare Call Center	24,197,626
Citizenship and Immigration Services	11,244,848
Department of Veterans Affairs – Veterans Benefits Administration Call Center	6,628,438
Office of Personnel Management	1,828,517
Railroad Retirement Board	1,344,022
Department of Labor – Office of Public Affairs	473,977
Federal Housing Administration	593,464
Department of Education	549,994
Department of Labor – Occupational Safety and Health Administration	301,592
Department of Labor – Employment & Training Administration	157,221
Department of Veterans Affairs – The Women Veterans Crisis Call Center	13,045

Note: The Department of Labor data is through June 2020. The Department of Veterans Affairs – The Women Veterans Crisis Call Center data is through August 2020.

Table G–2: Number of Busy Signals by Agency

Agency	FY 2020	Percent of Total Calls
Office of Personnel Management	3,579,955	N/A
Social Security Administration (see Appendix D, Table D–2 and Table D–3)	**5,000,203**	**3%**
Department of Veterans Affairs – The Women Veterans Crisis Call Center	243	2%
Internal Revenue Service	246,521	<1%
Department of Veterans Affairs – Veterans Benefits Administration Call Center	30	<1%

Note: The Office of Personnel Management does not count a busy signal in the total number of calls. Data from the remaining agencies were either not applicable or not maintained.

Table G–3: Calls Handled by Employees by Agency

Agency	FY 2020	Percent of Total Calls
Department of Veterans Affairs – Veterans Benefits Administration Call Center	6,180,781	93%
Office of Personnel Management	1,529,929	84%
Department of Veterans Affairs – The Women Veterans Crisis Call Center	10,207	78%
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services – Medicare Call Center	18,105,418	75%
Social Security Administration (see Appendix D, Table D–5 and Table D–6)	**63,284,817**	**42%**
Department of Labor – Office of Public Affairs	192,263	41%
Citizenship and Immigration Services	4,412,384	39%
Railroad Retirement Board	468,965	35%
Department of Labor – Employment & Training Administration	52,107	33%
Department of Labor – Occupational Safety and Health Administration	63,765	21%
U.S. Postal Service	13,577,639	14%
Department of Education	35,175	6%
Internal Revenue Service	3,970,361	6%
Federal Housing Administration	837	<1%

Note: The figures for the Federal Housing Administration only reflect contract employees and do not include employees who handle escalated inquiries. The Department of Labor data is through June 2020.

Table G–4: Calls Handled by Automation by Agency

Agency	FY 2020	Percent of Total Calls
U.S. Postal Service	63,173,287	63%
Citizenship and Immigration Services	6,146,195	55%
Department of Labor – Occupational Safety and Health Administration	120,660	40%
Department of Veterans Affairs – Veterans Benefits Administration Call Center	1,890,083	29%
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services – Medicare Call Center	6,686,294	28%
Railroad Retirement Board	208,918	16%
Internal Revenue Service	2,438,468	4%
Social Security Administration (see Appendix D, Table D–7)	**4,361,130**	**3%**

Note: Data from the remaining agencies were either not applicable or not maintained. The Department of Labor – Occupational Safety and Health Administration data is through June 2020.

Table G–5: Calls Abandoned in Queue by Agency

Agency	FY 2020	Percent of Total Calls
Railroad Retirement Board	532,921	40%
Office of Personnel Management	298,588	16%
Department of Veterans Affairs – The Women Veterans Crisis Call Center	2,063	16%
Department of Labor – Office of Public Affairs	63,430	13%
Department of Labor – Employment & Training Administration	19,163	12%
Social Security Administration (see Appendix D, Table D–5 and Table D–6)	**16,472,677**	**11%**
U.S. Postal Service	7,722,482	7%
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services – Medicare Call Center	1,742,193	7%
Department of Veterans Affairs – Veterans Benefits Administration Call Center	447,564	7%
Department of Labor – Occupational Safety and Health Administration	18,903	6%
Citizenship and Immigration Services	616,497	5%
Federal Housing Administration	26,127	4%
Internal Revenue Service	1,051,138	2%
Department of Education	1,198	<1%

Note: The Department of Labor data is through June 2020. The Department of Veterans Affairs – The Women Veterans Crisis Call Center data is through August 2020. Railroad Retirement Board did not track whether calls were abandoned in queue or menus. Therefore, data for the Railroad Retirement Board are also included in Table G–6.

Table G–6: Calls Abandoned in Menus by Agency

Agency	FY 2020	Percent of Total Calls
Railroad Retirement Board	532,921	40%
Department of Labor – Occupational Safety and Health Administration	52,485	17%
Internal Revenue Service	10,662,188	16%
Social Security Administration (see Appendix D, Table D–4)	**11,247,594**	**15%**
Federal Housing Administration	75,208	13%

Note: The Department of Labor – Occupational Safety and Health Administration data is through June 2020. Railroad Retirement Board did not track whether calls were abandoned in queue or menus. Therefore, data for the Railroad Retirement Board are also included in Table G–5. Data from the remaining agencies were either not applicable or not maintained.

Table G–7: Average Speed of Answer by Agency

Agency	FY 2020
Railroad Retirement Board	21.4 minutes
Internal Revenue Service	20.2 minutes
Social Security Administration – National 800-number (see Appendix D, Table D–10)	**16.1 minutes**
Department of Labor – Office of Public Affairs	14.6 minutes
Department of Labor – Employment & Training Administration	13.1 minutes
Citizenship and Immigration Services	11.5 minutes
U.S. Postal Service	11.3 minutes
Department of Labor – Occupational Safety and Health Administration	7.4 minutes
Office of Personnel Management	6 minutes
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services – Medicare Call Center	5.1 minutes
Department of Veterans Affairs – Veterans Benefits Administration Call Center	3.2 minutes
Social Security Administration – Field Office (see Appendix D, Table D–10)	**2.4 minutes**
Federal Housing Administration	1.1 minutes
Department of Education	32 seconds
Department of Veterans Affairs – The Women Veterans Crisis Call Center	10 seconds

Note: The Department of Labor data is through June 2020. The Department of Veterans Affairs – The Women Veterans Crisis Call Center data is through August 2020.

Table G–8: First Call Resolution by Agency

Agency	FY 2020 (Percent)
Department of Labor – Occupational Safety and Health Administration	100.0%
Department of Labor – Employment & Training Administration	99.9%
Department of Labor – Office of Public Affairs	99.9%
Social Security Administration	**81.7%**
Federal Housing Administration	59.8%
U.S. Postal Service	49.1%

Note: The Department of Labor data is through June 2020. SSA data is through March 2020. The remaining agencies did not track first call resolution.

Table G–9: Customer Satisfaction by Agency

Agency	FY 2020 (Percent)
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services – Medicare Call Center	94.0%
Citizenship and Immigration Services	92.0%
Social Security Administration	**83.8%**
Department of Labor – Occupational Safety and Health Administration	81.7%
Department of Labor – Office of Public Affairs	80.9%
Department of Labor – Employment & Training Administration	80.8%
U.S. Postal Service	69.1%

Note: The Federal Housing Administration measures customer satisfaction on a 6-point scale, with a score over 5.5 indicating a caller is "very satisfied." The rating for both October 2019 and September 2020 indicated a customer satisfaction score of "satisfied." The Department of Labor data is through June 2020. SSA data is through March 2020. Data from the remaining agencies were either not applicable or not maintained.

Appendix H —AGENCY COMMENTS

SOCIAL SECURITY

Date:	November 17, 2021	**Refer To:** TQA-1	

To: Gail S. Ennis
Inspector General

From: Scott Frey
Chief of Staff

Subject: Office of the Inspector General Draft Congressional Response Report, "The Social Security Administration's Telephone Service Performance" (A-05-20-50999) — INFORMATION

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report. On November 10, 2021, we re-started the unification process by incrementally moving National 800-Number Network (N8NN) agents to the Next Generation Telephone Project unification platform. We will continue to move N8NN agents to the platform until complete, ensuring the stability of the platform as we transition.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance. You may direct staff inquiries to Trae Sommer at (410) 965-9102.

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

Report: Social Security-related scams and Social Security fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement, at oig.ssa.gov/report.

Connect: OIG.SSA.GOV

Visit our website to read about our audits, investigations, fraud alerts, news releases, whistleblower protection information, and more.

Follow us on social media via these external links:

 Twitter: @TheSSAOIG

 Facebook: OIGSSA

 YouTube: TheSSAOIG

 Subscribe to email updates on our website.