



Office of the Inspector General
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Press Release

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Record-breaking Backlog Increases Improper Payments by Over \$1B

Less Staff, Increased Workloads, Decreased Funding Led to Unprecedented Backlog

As a backlog of payment actions affecting Social Security beneficiaries continues to mount, so does a rise in the Agency's improper payments. As of February 2024, SSA's pending actions backlog reached an all-time high of 5.2 million pending actions, resulting in \$1.1 billion in improper payments.

According to the report issued by its Inspector General, [Reducing Processing Centers' Pending Actions \(022313\)](#), SSA's performance measure is to reduce the number of pending actions at processing centers (PC), as the pending actions alone contribute to an increase in improper payments. However, SSA's backlog and pending actions goal have increased since Fiscal Year (FY) 2018. While SSA met its goals in four of the last six fiscal years between FY 2018 through 2023, the Agency's pending actions backlog increased by 44 percent from 3.2 to 4.6 million pending actions, during that same timeframe.

As the backlog grows, many processing center (PC) pending actions remain unresolved for long periods of time resulting in larger improper payments, including growing underpayments or increasing overpayments to beneficiaries.

SSA cited unexpected staff reductions, increased workloads, and less than expected overtime funding that would have been used to pay employees to process more PC pending actions, as explanation for the record-breaking backlog.

Although only falling short of meeting its annual goal in FYs 2019 and 2022, there was no overall reduction in PC pending actions for the last six fiscal years.

"Customer satisfaction has been an ongoing concern for SSA. This report continues to highlight the urgency for SSA to reach its pending actions performance goal and to ensure beneficiaries receive their proper payments as promptly as possible," said Michelle Anderson, Assistant Inspector General for Audit serving as the Acting Inspector General for SSA.

The Office of the Inspector General made three recommendations to SSA to consider for its backlog reduction. SSA agreed with those recommendations.

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