



QUARTERLY SCAM UPDATE

Issue 8

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

January 1, 2023 – March 31, 2023

Social Security-Related Scams

The Social Security Administration (SSA) and SSA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) continue to receive reports of scammers impersonating government employees or alleging a Social Security-related problem to steal money or personal information from victims.

Since October 2019, OIG has shared information on its efforts to combat Social Security-related scams with the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Social Security; U.S. Senate Committee on Finance; and U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging. OIG began publicly releasing the Quarterly Scam Update in the third quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 to provide information about these scams and its efforts to combat them.

This report shares information about Social Security-related and government imposter scam allegation trends in the second quarter (Q2) of FY 2023 (January 1 through March 31). Examples of SSA and OIG's recent efforts to disrupt and raise awareness of scams are also included.

Figure 1

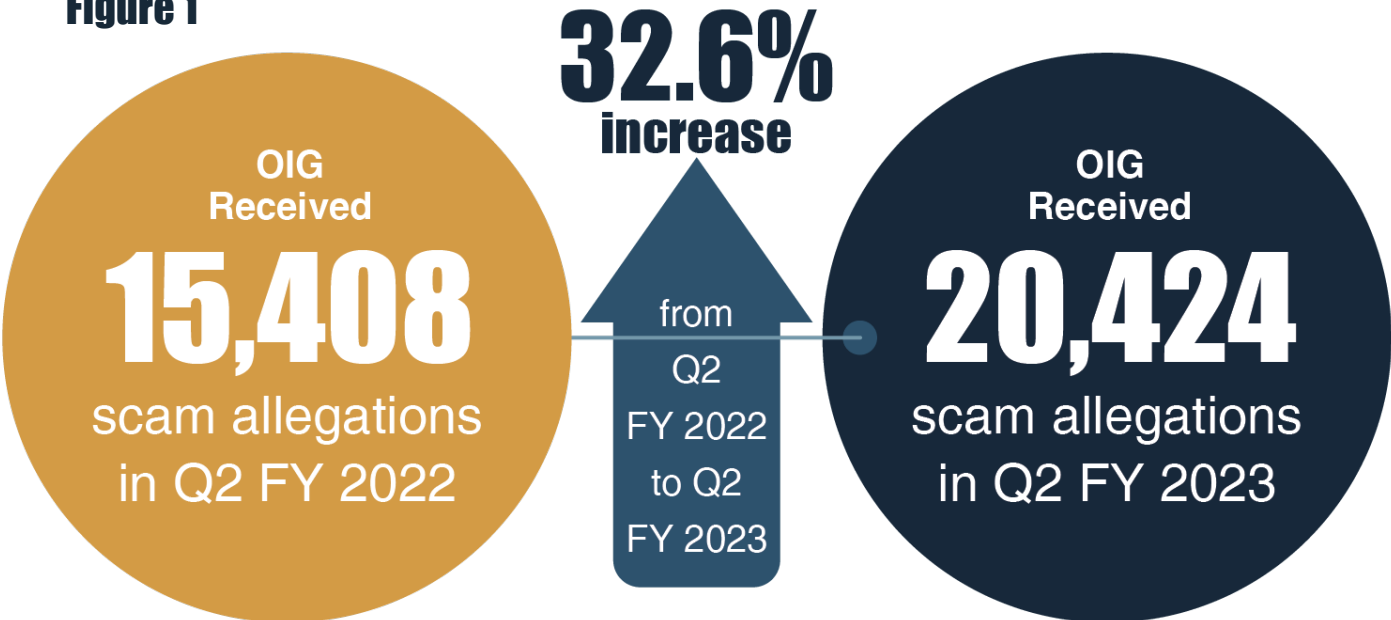
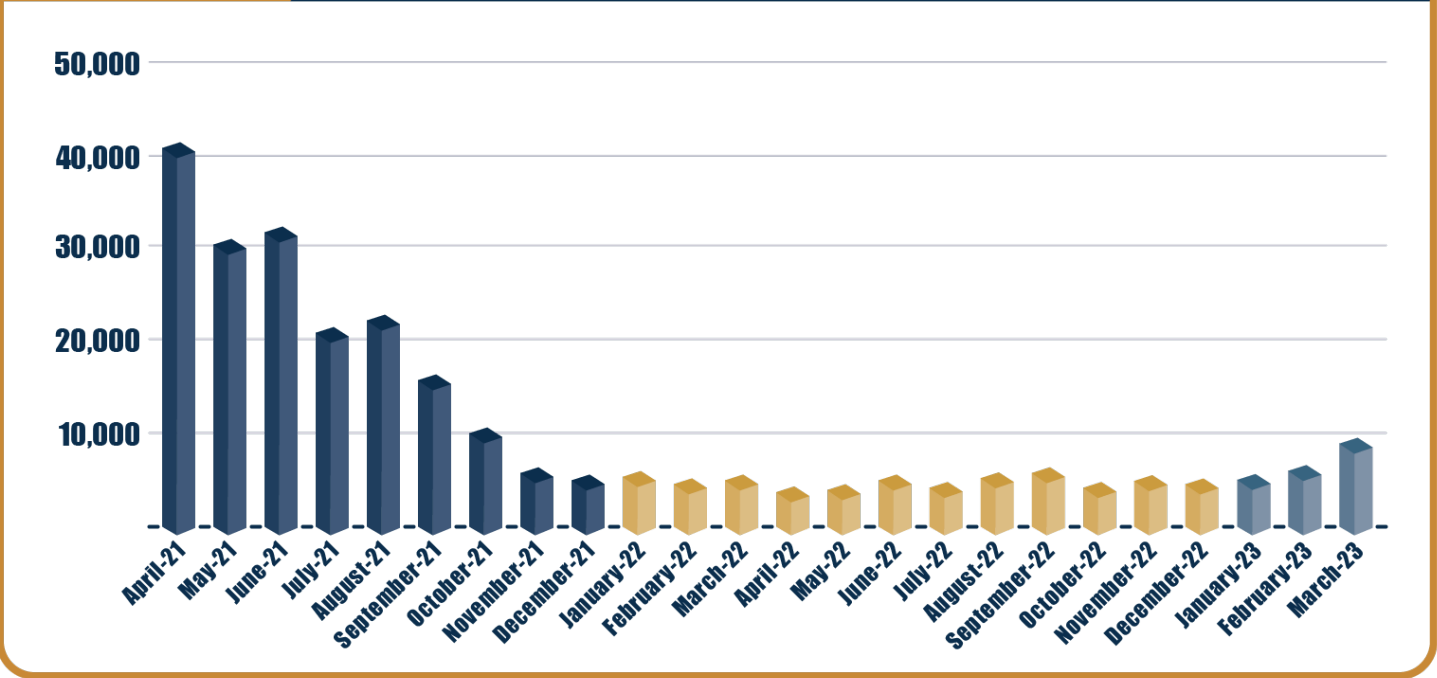


Figure 2







Imposter Scam Complaints Received by SSA OIG
April 2021 to March 2023



SSA OIG receives the majority of Social Security-related scam allegations from OIG's dedicated online scam reporting form.¹ While the form states it is for those who "believe [they] have been a victim of a Social Security Administration Scam," the form also allows individuals to report whether the scam involved the impersonation of officials from federal, state, or local government agencies other than SSA.

Figure 3

Q1 and Q2 FY 2023 Complaint Trends – Percentage of Total Imposter Allegations from the Scam Reporting Form¹

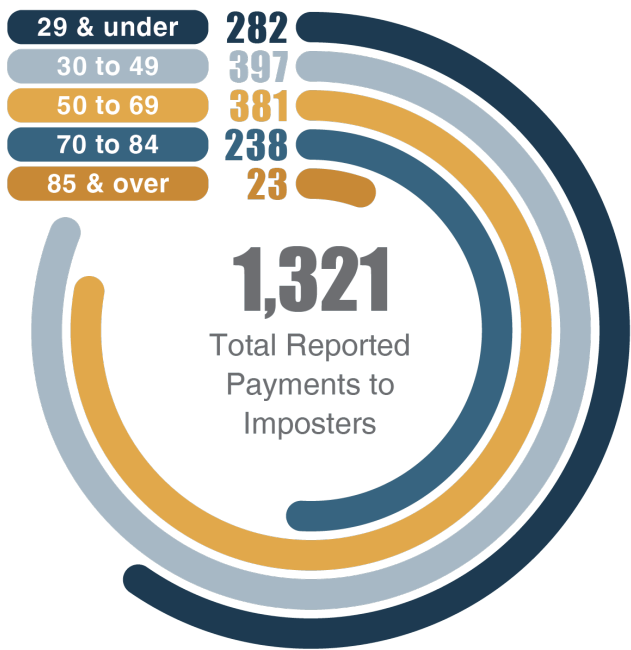
Complaint Characteristics		Q1 10/1/22–12/31/22	Q2 1/1/23–3/31/23
	The imposter mentioned a problem with your Social Security number	35.9%	43.1%
	The imposter mentioned a problem with your Social Security benefits	16.5%	17.0%
	The imposter used documents or images (such as a federal logo) when communicating with you	24.6%	29.7%
	The scam involved the impersonation of officials from federal, state, or local government agencies other than the Social Security Administration	33.6%	35.8%
	The imposter mentioned a coronavirus or COVID-19 related issue, or referred to a coronavirus or COVID-19 stimulus check, stimulus payment, or economic impact payment	2.2%	2.4%
	None of the Above	33.1%	28.2%

Note: The percentages were calculated based on the total number of allegations each quarter. The percentages do not add to 100 percent because individual allegations may include more than one complaint characteristic.

1. SSA OIG also receives allegations from other sources, including SSA OIG's Hotline and directly from SSA employees. SSA OIG has been tracking Social Security-related scam allegations since April 2018. SSA OIG launched the dedicated online reporting form in November 2019, which increased its ability to track scam reports.

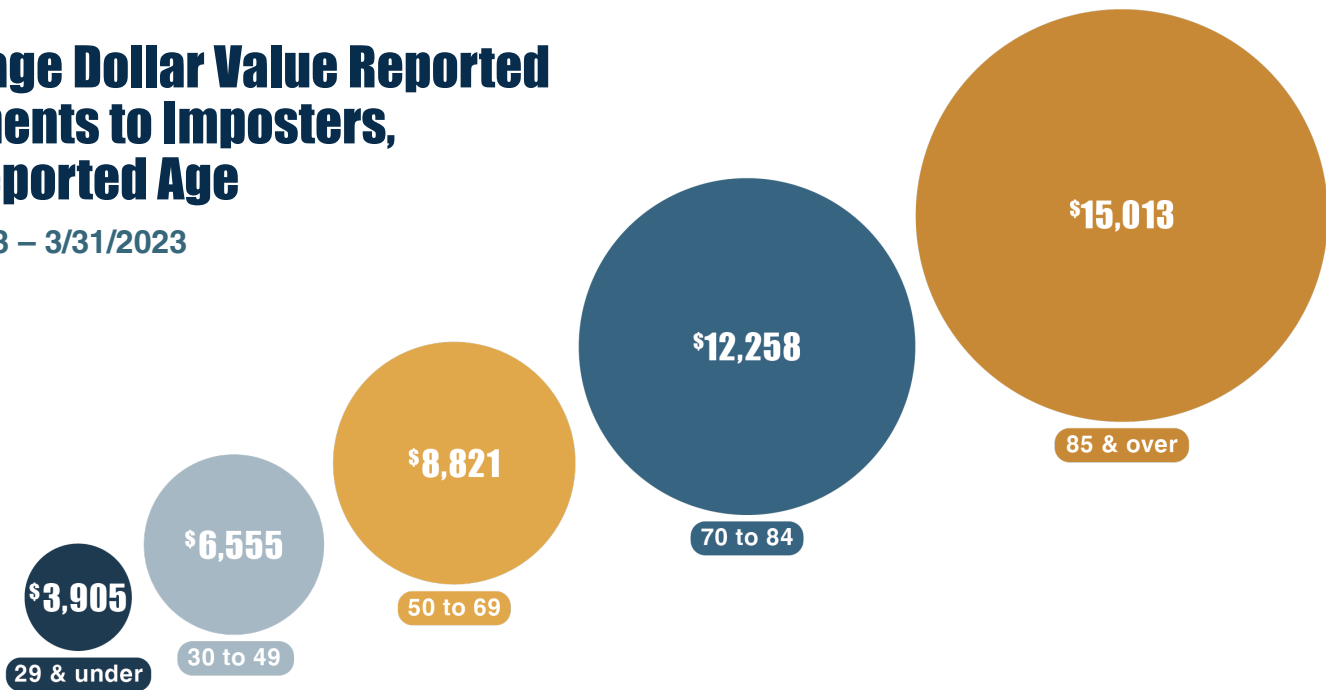
In Q1 FY 2023, more individuals under 50 years of age [reported](#) financial losses than those 50 years of age or older. Figure 4 (below) shows that in Q2 FY 2023, this trend continued: 679 individuals under 50 years of age reported losses, compared with 642 individuals 50 years of age and older.

Figure 4
Number of Reported Payments to Imposters, by Reported Age
1/1/2023 – 3/31/2023



In Q1 FY 2023, individuals 50 years of age and over [reported](#) higher average losses than those under 50 years of age. Additionally, during October 1 through December 31, 2022, the highest average losses were reported by individuals 85 years of age and over. Figure 5 (below) shows that in Q2 FY 2023, these trends continued.

Figure 5
Average Dollar Value Reported Payments to Imposters, by Reported Age
1/1/2023 – 3/31/2023



On March 9, 2023, SSA OIG partnered with SSA for the fourth annual National Slam the Scam Day. As part of the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) Consumer Protection Week, Slam the Scam Day raises public awareness of the pervasive Social Security-related and other government imposter scams. This year SSA and SSA OIG engaged in outreach with media, participated in English and Spanish Twitter chats, developed and disseminated video clips, and spread their message on social media.

National Slam the Scam Day March 9, 2023



Twitter

- **144,000** impressions on Slam the Scam posts
- **1.1 million** #SlamtheScam followers



Facebook

- **135,000** reach from Slam the Scam posts
- **2.4 million** #SlamtheScam followers



Instagram

- **56,000** reach from Slam the Scam posts



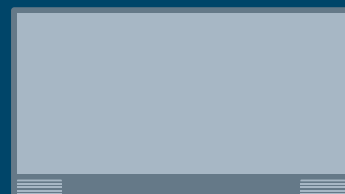
Radio Audience:
1,637,000



**Total Online + Print
Audience: 82,721,839**



Television Audience:
1,681,300

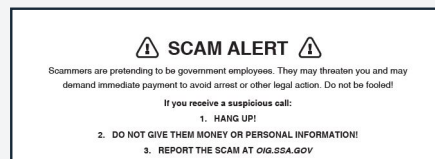


Senate Resolution

Senate passed by Unanimous Consent
S.Res.101 designating March 9, 2023
as National Slam the Scam Day

According to the FTC, government imposter scam complaints have declined since 2021; however, Social Security-related scams [remain](#) the top government imposter type reported to the FTC.² Therefore, while the decline is promising, OIG and SSA continue to fight these scams.

In Q2 FY 2023, SSA mailed **107.9 million** letters to the public with a scam message printed on the back of envelopes (right). Through March 31, 2023, the Agency had mailed approximately **808 million** of these letters to date.



SSA's latest Scam Awareness Public Service Announcement (left), which started airing in late October 2021, generated **131.2 million** impressions in Q2 FY 2023.

Q2 FY 2023 Additional Internal and External Education Efforts

SSA and SSA OIG engaged in additional outreach and education efforts with members of the public, government and non-government organizations, and SSA employees to raise awareness of scams targeting American residents. Some examples of these efforts during Q2 FY 2023 included the activities below.



SSA OIG participated in the Easy Prey Podcast, Episode 158, "[The 4 P's of Scams](#)," which aired on March 8, 2023.

Throughout Q2 FY 2023, SSA OIG's Office of Investigations met with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, employees in SSA's field offices and teleservice centers, State Attorneys General, and non-government organizations to provide presentations on scam awareness.



SSA provided guidance to employees on the importance of using proper language, grammar, and tone when drafting notices to ensure the public can distinguish between legitimate agency notices and scam notices.

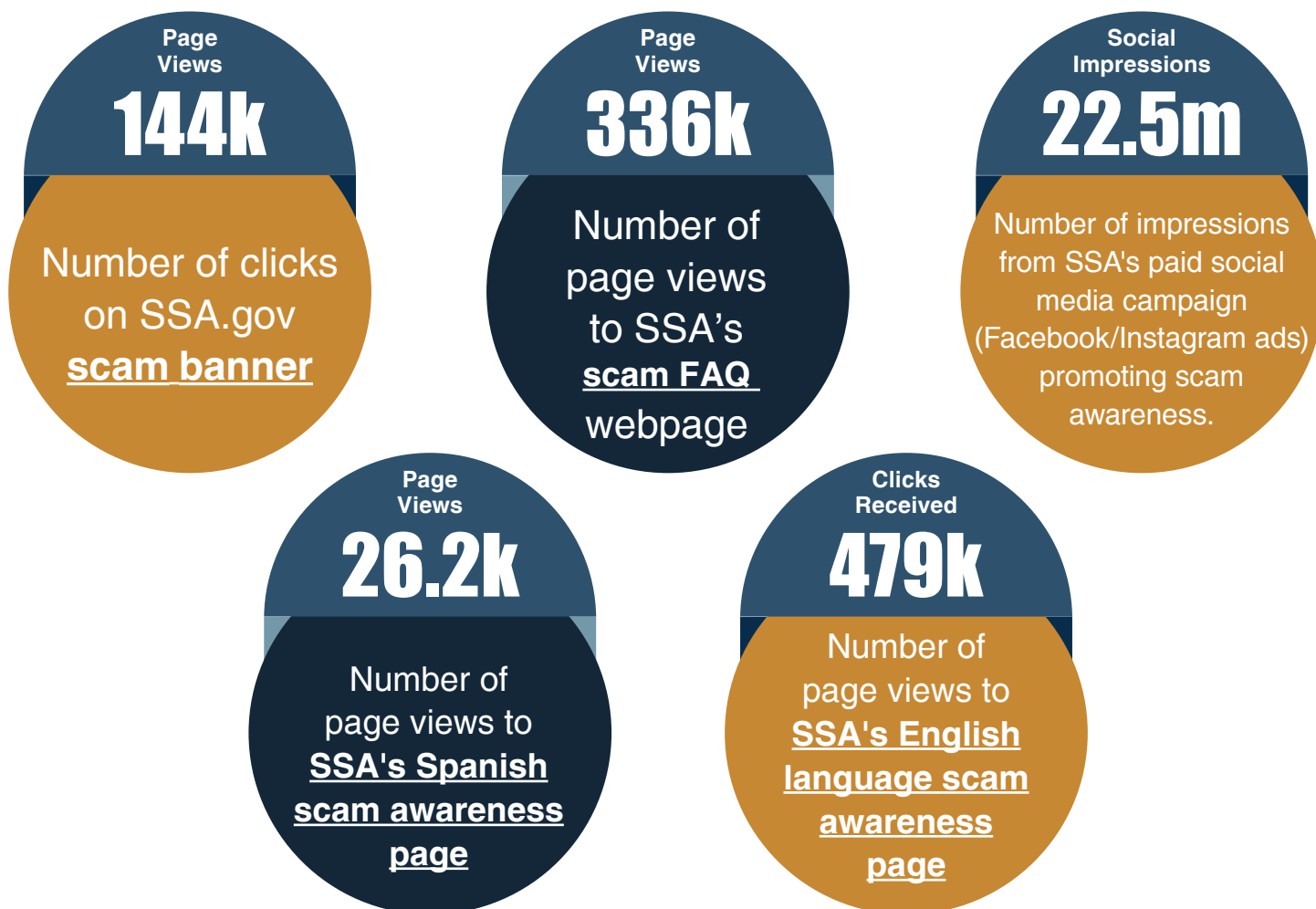
SSA provided training to frontline employees on current scam tactics, along with prevention and reporting methods, to assist members of the public who contact SSA with questions about scams.



SSA improved access to internal scam resources to support employees in protecting the public against scams.

2. This information is based on data reported to the FTC as of April 25, 2023.

Q2 FY 2023 Website Page Views and Social Media Impressions



Q2 FY 2023 SSA OIG Social Media Related to Scam Alerts

In addition to ongoing web and social media efforts, OIG issued a [scam alert](#) on March 8, 2023 using its Facebook and Twitter accounts. OIG also posted the alert to its new LinkedIn account.



5,712
Impressions

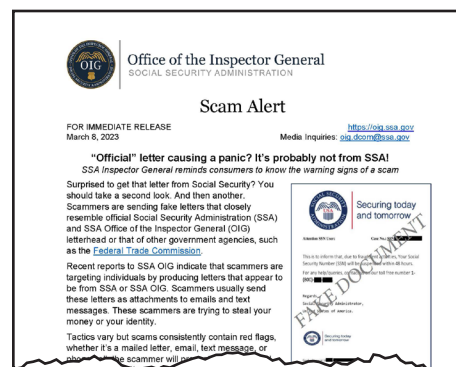


1,347
Impressions



398
Impressions

Sample Section of the Scam Alert



Consumer Protection: Telecom Gateway Providers

Section 1140 of the *Social Security Act*, as amended, protects the public from advertisements, solicitations, and other communications that convey the false impression that SSA approved, endorsed, or authorized the communication. SSA OIG continued efforts to protect consumers from Social Security-related scam calls by seeking corrective action against U.S. telecommunications companies, acting as gateway carriers, who profit by accepting Social Security-related scam calls into the U.S. telecommunications system, and passing them to unsuspecting consumers. During Q2 FY 2023, SSA OIG resolved matters with 10 gateway carrier telecommunications companies, including imposing \$145,484.00 in penalties. As a result of SSA OIG's Section 1140 and other efforts, the telecommunications industry is on notice of the potential legal ramifications for transiting Social Security-related calls. Telecommunications companies are taking more proactive steps to prohibit scam calls from entering the U.S. or are discontinuing the gateway carrier segment of their operations or operations entirely. In addition, SSA OIG initiated 36 take down requests for misleading Social Security-related social media accounts during Q2 FY 2023. SSA OIG continues to stay vigilant regarding Social Security-related imposter social media accounts, recognizing the public's vulnerability to harm from social media scams and these scams' interference with the Agency's ability to effectively communicate via its robust social media program.

Man Sentenced for Money Laundering Conspiracy Relating to Government Impersonator Scam

In March 2023, a 28-year-old Tampa, Florida resident was sentenced to 18 months in federal prison for conspiracy to commit money laundering. As part of his sentence, the court also entered an order of forfeiture in the amount of \$245,890, the proceeds of the crime. According to court documents, India-based conspirators falsely and fraudulently identified themselves as federal law enforcement officers, such as SSA officials, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents, or Internal Revenue Service (IRS) officers, provided fictitious titles and/or badge numbers, and threatened their victims with imminent arrest, a lawsuit, and/or other economic consequences, usually based on alleged drug trafficking or money laundering crimes supposedly committed using the victims' identities. The conspirators told victims, the majority of whom were older adults, that they could avoid these consequences by mailing checks or cash equivalents to conspirators in the U.S. From April 2018, through at least August 2018, the individual laundered money that had been extorted from members of the public by conspirators residing in the U.S. and overseas. This case was investigated by Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), the IRS-Criminal Investigation, and SSA OIG. You can read more about the case [here](#).

Fourth Sentenced in Government Impersonation Call Center Scam

In January 2023, a 28-year-old Indian citizen residing in Houston, Texas was ordered to serve 29 months in federal prison for conspiracy to commit mail fraud. The court further ordered him to pay \$635,103 in restitution to the victims of the conspiracy. As a non-U.S. citizen, he is also expected to face removal proceedings following imprisonment. Between December 2019 and July 2020, the individual was a "runner" in an Indian-based call center scam. Callers in India would contact potential victims in the U.S. to extort money from them. The individual would then use aliases and fake identification documents to pick up parcels containing cash which the victims had mailed. One common script used in the scheme involved coercing victims into believing federal agents from SSA or another federal agency were investigating them. The fake agent on the phone would convince the victim the only way to clear their name from investigation was to send cash in a parcel shipped through FedEx to a name and address they provided. Runners in the U.S. would then pick up the parcels. Throughout the course of the investigation, law enforcement identified hundreds of victims of this scheme, with total losses exceeding millions of dollars. SSA OIG, the FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security OIG conducted the investigation with the assistance of the Houston Police Department and TIGTA. You can read more about the case [here](#).



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