

Disability Denials in 2009 in Buchanan, Oklahoma, and Dallas Counties

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) followed the *Social Security Act* and its regulations, policies, and procedures when it denied claims for disability benefits in 2009 for individuals from Buchanan County, Virginia; Oklahoma County, Oklahoma; and Dallas County, Alabama.

Background

On November 5, 2012, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (PSI), requested a review of disability denials in three specific counties.

The *Social Security Act* defines disability as a medically determinable impairment(s) that prevents an adult from engaging in any substantial gainful activity and causes a child to have marked and severe functional limitations. To carry out the provisions in the Act, SSA put policies and procedures in place.

For our review, we determined whether SSA (including the disability determination services [DDS]) followed certain policies and procedures when denying disability claims.

Our Findings

In our sample of 300 cases, we found 28 in which SSA (or the DDSs) did not follow some policies and procedures. However, although SSA did not follow certain policies and procedures, it correctly denied benefits in these 28 cases based on the evidence available for our review.

Below are the policies and procedures SSA did not follow.

- Making a reasonable attempt to obtain all relevant evidence related to a claimant's condition.
- Considering medical opinions.
- Asking the treating source(s) to conduct a consultative examination or ruling the source out.
- Determining the credibility of the claimant's statements regarding his/her symptoms.
- Assessing the severity of multiple non-severe impairments in combination.
- Determining whether the claimant could do past relevant work or any other work.