Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 23, 2026

https://oig.ssa.gov
Media Inquiries: oig.press@ssa.gov

OIG Report Identifies $1 Billion in Improper SSI Payments Due to Unresolved Earnings Alerts

The Social Security Administration (SSA) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has released an audit report examining how effectively SSA resolved Supplemental Security Income (SSI) earnings alerts. The review found delays and incomplete actions that resulted in significant improper payments to SSI recipients.

The SSI program provides monthly cash assistance to people who are aged, blind, or disabled and have limited income and resources. SSA evaluates recipients' income monthly. Generally, as a recipient's income increases, their SSI payment decreases. If a recipient's income exceeds allowable limits in a month, the recipient is not eligible for SSI payments for that month.

To maintain accurate earnings information, SSA uses the earnings alert system to identify discrepancies between a recipient's reported and actual wages. A discrepancy occurs when a recipient's actual earnings differ from the earnings SSA used to calculate the SSI payment. In June 2026, SSA reportedly issued about $5.8 billion in SSI payments to approximately seven million recipients

The audit, *Supplemental Security Income Earnings Alerts*, identified 417,291 SSI recipients with at least one pending earnings alert and examined a sample of 100 cases. OIG found SSA employees appropriately resolved alerts for only 20 of the 100 recipients. The remaining 80 cases showed two major issues: earnings alerts left entirely unresolved and earnings alerts cleared without fully verifying wage information.

Based on the sample, OIG estimated SSA improperly paid approximately $1 billion to 333,800 recipients whose earnings were not properly reviewed or recorded. Due to administrative finality rules, SSA will be unable to recover an estimated $664 million of those payments unless fraud or similar fault is established. However, approximately $344 million in improper payments remain recoverable.

The audit also found:

- For **63 recipients**, SSA employees did not begin or complete required reviews, leaving earnings alerts pending for an average of **733 days**.

- For **17 recipients**, employees cleared alerts but failed to document all earnings that should have been used to determine correct SSI eligibility and payment amounts.

- In some cases, earnings alerts remained unresolved for several years, significantly limiting SSA's ability to revise past payments or recover overpayments.

"SSA has the opportunity to strengthen its controls to ensure employees timely and accurately resolve earnings alerts, which can improve the Agency's ability to identify and recover SSI payments that recipients would not have been eligible to receive had SSA considered their unreported earnings," said Michelle L. Anderson, Assistant Inspector General for Audit as First Assistant. "Timely and thorough resolution of earnings alerts can also help SSA recover overpayments before administrative finality provisions limit—and in some cases eliminate—the Agency's authority to do so, resulting in a permanent loss to the Federal government."

OIG issued three recommendations for SSA:

1. Review and take corrective action on the 63 earnings alerts that Agency employees did not start or complete.

2. Review and take corrective action on the 17 earnings alerts where Agency employees did not record all earnings.

3. Identify the factors contributing to employees not diligently pursuing earnings alerts or not accurately resolving them, and implement appropriate corrective measures.

SSA agreed to implement OIG's recommendations.

Read the full report here.

###