

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 29, 2024

The Honorable Gail S. Ennis  
Inspector General  
Social Security Administration  
6401 Security Boulevard, Suite 300  
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Inspector General Ennis,

This letter is a follow-on to the one you received on August 28, 2023, and is in response to your reply received on November 3, 2023.

Thank you for your continued work to evaluate the impact of remote work on service delivery and management at the Social Security Administration (SSA). We were pleased to learn your office's audit work plan for Fiscal Year 2024 includes an assessment of changes in productivity at the SSA, including human capital and service delivery.

Since your November 2023 reply, multiple reports have surfaced of Organizational Payees in Iowa experiencing egregious delays with their SSA field office. Alarming, the SSA field office in Sioux City, Iowa has established a pattern of ignoring outreach from Organizational Payees entirely.

Currently, SSA field office employees may only telework two days per week.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the Sioux City SSA field office's timing for addressing simple requests often takes weeks to months, denying everyone involved access to answers and assistance, and imparting significant delays on beneficiaries. What's more, when presented with concerns about response times, the Sioux City SSA field office is dismissive or provides no substantive updates, if an answer is provided at all. This is unacceptable.

An Organizational Payee whistleblower recently shared the following message which illustrates how dire this situation has become:

*From:* [REDACTED]  
*Sent:* Thursday, March 7, 2024 11:00 AM  
*To:* [REDACTED]  
*Subject:* SSA

*Hi [REDACTED]*  
*Here is the email I sent out to the Assistant District Manager at the [REDACTED] SSA office*

*Hi [REDACTED]*  
*Did you receive the fax I sent yesterday regarding the dedicated accounts?*

*Also, we had our department meeting and we have faxed 12 intakes out to the SSA office and we have not received any calls on them. Some of these date back to December 2023. Can you follow up and let me know the status? They all have been sent to your attention. We can't take any more referrals til those get some movement on the ones we have at your office.*

*Thank you!*

*I'm at a loss of what to do to get things moving in the right direction.*

*Thank you!*

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Wagner, *O'Malley Reduces Telework for Social Security HQ, Regional Office Staff*, Government Executive (Feb. 1, 2024), <https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2024/02/omalley-reduces-telework-social-security-hq-regional-office-staff/393848/>.

Across the federal government, agencies have been reluctant to send their workforces back to the office despite repeated calls from the Biden administration to do so, but the SSA stands out above all others.<sup>2</sup>

The Government Accountability Office found the SSA headquarters has more vacant and unused office space than any other agency, with just 7 percent of the available space being used at any given time.<sup>3</sup> That means more than 90 percent of the building is deserted on a day-to-day basis. When this is the tone being set at headquarters, persistent service delivery failures in field offices come as no surprise. It is clear remote work is not only causing deficiencies in service delivery, but taxpayer funds are also being wasted maintaining empty buildings each day federal employees refuse to return to the office.

As expressed in the previous letter, it is well past time for the federal workforce to return to work at their duty stations. With hybrid and remote working now standard practice for the federal workforce, it is crucial to ensure not one of the more than 677,000 Iowans relying on the SSA for benefits and services annually are being negatively impacted by the arrangement.<sup>4</sup>

We cannot understate the importance of this issue to everyday Americans. The folks we are hearing from have dedicated their lives to taking care of the disadvantaged, and so many Iowans depend upon them every day. When federal employees largely abandoned their offices to work remotely four years ago at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, these essential workers kept showing up to serve the vulnerable, disabled, and elderly. Now, these folks could lose access to those service providers who they rely upon if SSA's unresponsiveness and delays put them out of business. This situation demands immediate attention, and we cannot tolerate its continuation.

As part of your review of service delivery, we would invite you to discuss these problems with the service providers who have contacted us and would be happy to make those connections.

Thank you for your time and attention to this letter, we look forward to reviewing your report on changes in productivity at the SSA.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator



Randy Feenstra  
Member of Congress

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<sup>2</sup> Brett Samuels, *White House Urges Federal Agencies to Increase In-Person Work*, The Hill (Aug. 4, 2023), <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/4138445-white-house-urges-federal-agencies-to-increase-in-person-work/>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Gov't Accountability Office, Government Accountability Office, GAO-23-106200, Preliminary Results Show Federal Buildings Remain Underutilized Due to Longstanding Challenges and Increased Telework (2023).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Social Security Administration, *Number of OASDI Beneficiaries in Current-Payment Status and Total Monthly Benefits, December 2022*, U.S. Social Security Administration (Mar. 26, 2024), [https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/factsheets/cong\\_stats/2022/ia.html](https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/factsheets/cong_stats/2022/ia.html).