

Questions for Sean Brune
Deputy Commissioner for Systems and Chief
Information Officer
Social Security Administration

From Subcommittee on Government Operations
House Oversight and Reform Committee

July 28th 2021 FITARA Hearing

- 1. The Social Security Administration (SSA) was one of four agencies to receive an “F” in the “Incremental Development” metric on the FITARA 12.0 scorecard. Could you please explain why it appears that none of SSA’s projects are using incremental development?**

In accordance with FITARA, we produce, and our Chief Information Officer reviews, a quarterly report that tracks our incremental development progress. These reports show that all 13 of our major investment projects are delivering incrementally. However, the methodology for measuring incremental development changed for the FITARA Scorecard 12.0 due to a change in the Federal IT Dashboard data availability¹. As a result, the FITARA Scorecard 12.0 did not reflect our continued progress on incremental development. We note that when this data was available in December 2020, the FITARA Scorecard 11.0 reported that 75 percent of our major investments were delivering incrementally.

We are hopeful that incremental development fields will return to the IT Dashboard for the FY 2023 budget cycle, and that the data will be available for the next FITARA Scorecard. We believe these fields provide an increased level of transparency for our incremental development data, and our score will improve as a result.

- 2. The SSA Inspector General’s audit of the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) metrics reported that SSA provided incorrect or unsupported responses for the majority of the metrics sampled for review. The Office of Inspector General noted that “[w]ithout reliable data, [the Office of Management and Budget] and Congress may not be able to properly assess the state of SSA’s cybersecurity.” What caused the high level of inaccuracies in SSA’s FISMA responses, and what actions has SSA taken to ensure that won’t happen again?**

We value our partnership with our Inspector General and take seriously our responsibility to cooperate with its annual FISMA reviews. The issue OIG cited stemmed from the auditor’s request for FISMA data from a prior fiscal year and quarter, and our limited ability to reproduce point-in-time reports for those periods. To address this, we established a FISMA reporting process to ensure auditors have access to accurate and complete data for current and prior reporting periods. As a result of our actions, OIG did not issue any recommendations related to the above-noted concerns. We also continue to mature our information security reporting capabilities, and will keep working closely with auditors to assist in assessing the state of our cybersecurity.

¹ The following fields were removed from the IT Dashboard: “Software Development Activity with Multiple Releases” and “Last Three Dates of Release to Production”.

3. Are there modernization projects you wish to undertake at SSA but are unable to do so due to the annualized nature of federal budgeting and appropriations?

We have experienced successful outcomes with multi-year IT appropriations. For example, the National Support Center (NSC) is a strong case for dedicated no-year funding because we were able to efficiently plan and execute the multi-year initiative with sustained funding levels guaranteed year over year. We received American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding to build the NSC and migrate our IT infrastructure to it. With \$500 million in dedicated ARRA funding, we were able to fully fund the NSC migration, and complete it on time and within budget. Now, the NSC is a leader in the data center arena for its design, processing ability and energy efficiencies. It received the GSA Honor Award in Engineering in 2016.

Since FY 2017, we have received \$415 million in no-year dedicated funding from Congress to execute our IT Modernization Plan. This dedicated funding helped us accelerate delivery and incorporate service improvements to the public. This funding covers a portion of the entire cost of our IT Modernization efforts, and annual appropriations fund the rest.

4. The transition off of the General Services Administration's expiring telecommunications contracts provides agencies a chance to make transformative technology changes at their agency. Some agencies, however, may simply use the corresponding metric on the FITARA Scorecard as a check-the-box exercise instead of taking time to migrate to services that improve mission and service delivery. How is SSA using the transition off of expiring telecommunications contracts to improve the agency's operations?

We have taken full advantage of this opportunity to make transformative technology changes by consolidating our many legacy GSA and non-GSA telecommunications contracts into three large Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions (EIS) task orders: one for our voice services network and two for our dual carrier data network. Through this streamlined approach, we have realized cost avoidance through economies of scale. We are on schedule to meet [GSA's transition timeline](#). Once we fully transition, we will reduce our annual spending for these same services by approximately 54 percent, or \$114 million. The new EIS contract services will also improve agency operations and customer service by modernizing our telephone services, increasing core network capacity across our many services and systems, and reducing operational administrative burdens related to legacy contracts.

5. What is the status of SSA's implementation of the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (Public Law No. 115-336)? Who within SSA is responsible for implementing the requirements of the Act?

In accordance with the requirements of the 21st Century IDEA, we continue to streamline our digital footprint and deliver a safe and convenient online experience for customers and business partners. We currently maintain 435 information collection tools² used to serve the

² Each of these 435 forms, processes, and information collections is associated with an OMB Control Number. Under the Paperwork Reduction Act, we receive OMB approval of our forms, processes and information collections under

public for which we receive OMB approval. Of these information collection tools, 114 can be submitted electronically and 321 require submission via paper or in-person processes. The 114 figure comprises those information collections that can be completely accessed, filled out, signed (if applicable), and submitted online by members of the public, with no input from or consultation with SSA. Of the 321 remaining information collection tools, many have electronic elements and are not purely paper-based, and thus help to alleviate the public burden. Many of these 321 collections do not require the public to fill out a form, but instead are completed by SSA employees based on an in-person or phone interview.

In 2020, we focused on improvements to the priorities listed in our 2019 21st Century IDEA Report to Congress³ such as *my Social Security* and our public facing website, [socialsecurity.gov](https://www.ssa.gov). We added new priorities in 2020 as we adjusted our service model to continue serving the public during the pandemic with service by appointment only. We are committed to continuing to improve service in alignment with the statute.

Our Chief Information Officer is responsible for coordinating and ensuring alignment of the internal and external customer service programs and strategy including implementation of this new law.

6. Please highlight any recent successes in improving customer experience or any areas where the agency has made improvements that align with the goals of the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act.

We continue to expand electronic and automated customer service options and IT solutions for the public to get the help they need. For example, within the last several years we have worked to implement and expand the following initiatives to improve customer experience and provide better, more timely service:

- **Digital Identity** –To increase secure registration options for individuals registering for a *my Social Security* account, we added a driver’s license verification option available to individuals residing in 43 states and the District of Columbia, covering approximately 83% of the population. This change helped us improve the registration rate by approximately 20 percent; more than 60 million Americans have now registered for a *my Social Security* personal account. The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators continues to coordinate with the remaining seven states to onboard them to this digital identity service option.
- **Internet Social Security Number Replacement Card** – We continue to collaborate with the States to expand our internet SSN replacement card application, which allows for U.S. citizens over the age of 18 with a driver’s license or State ID to request a replacement social security card so long as they do not need to make any changes to the information on the card. As of July 2021, 44 states and the District of Columbia participate in the application. We also added an online receipt feature to reduce visits to the field office.

232 OMB Control Numbers. An OMB Control Number may have more than one form, process, or collection associated with it.

³ https://www.ssa.gov/digitalstrategy/documents/2020_SSA_Report_to_OMB_-_21st_Century_IDEA.pdf

- **Enhanced Retirement Calculator** – Individuals can now estimate spousal benefits.
- **Hearings and Appeals Case Processing System (HACPS)** – Vendors who participate in our disability hearings process can now file invoices electronically, view call orders and invoices, and receive electronic notification of payments. Electronic invoicing is only available for cases processed in HACPS. Other cases have paper-based invoicing. We will phase out paper-based invoicing as these cases are resolved.
- **Digitized Forms** – During 2020, SSA began exploring new platforms for digitizing paper forms and services. Beneficiaries can now complete continuing disability Form SSA-455 Disability Update Report online, upload supporting documentation, and electronically sign and transmit the form in real-time for employees to review virtually, reducing processing time. Beneficiaries can also now apply online to enroll in Medicare Part B (Supplementary Medical Insurance) based on a Special Enrollment Period. Additionally, representatives and their clients can now complete the entire representative appointment process online, including accepting electronic signatures on notices of Appointment of Representative (Form SSA-1696). Other forms digitized through this process include the Request to Withdraw a Hearing Request (HA-85), the Request to Withdraw an Appeals Council Review (HA-86), the Waiver of Your Right to Personal Appearance Before an Administrative Law Judge (HA-4608), the Work Activity Report-Self Employment (SSA-820), and the Work Activity Report-Employee (SSA-821).
- **Video Service Delivery** – We continue to explore opportunities to use video technology solutions to balance workloads, reduce wait times, and provide a virtual face-to-face service option. In 2020, we implemented using Microsoft Teams for video hearings conducted in our Office of Hearings Operations.
- **Access to Electronic Files** – Unrepresented claimants may now view and download their electronic files via [my Social Security](#). If they do not have a [my Social Security](#) account, they may also receive a PDF copy of their file via secure email. We also increased the maximum file size for uploading digital documents. Currently, individuals seeking to view their electronic files must make a request through an SSA field office. However, we are exploring tools for automating the process via [my Social Security](#) in the future. Appointed representatives can now view their claimants file at the initial and reconsideration levels via Appointed Representative Services.
- **Individual Representative Payee Portal** – Individual payees with a [my Social Security](#) account can now obtain online benefit verification letters and replacement SSA-1099/1042S tax forms, view previously submitted accounting reports, update reports with exceptions, and update their addresses and phone numbers.
- **Notices** – We continue to expand the availability of electronic notices through [my Social Security](#) and now offer customers the choice to opt-out of receiving printed notices they receive through the portal. New notices launched in FY 2020-FY 2021 include: the Income-Related Monthly Adjustment Amount Benefit Rate Increase, the Social Security Number Replacement Card Receipt Notice, the Advanced Designation of Representative Payees Receipt and Annual Reminder Notices, and the Consolidated Claim Medicare Award and Disallowance Notices.

- **Desktop Faxing** – Our field offices, teleservice centers, hearing offices, and the Office of Appellate Operations can now send and receive faxes through email, reducing costs and improving processing times.
 - **Targeted Event Based Emails** – We enhanced our online claim status system by providing customers more detailed information, including an estimated claim processing time (based on the state’s Disability Determination Service’s (DDS) processing time) and what to expect next. For example, now when an individual submits an application through iClaim, they will receive automated emails when (among other events): the application is transferred to the DDS for review, hearings are scheduled, and a decision is made. We have found that sending event-based emails reduces follow up inquiries by one-third, allowing technicians to focus on other critical workloads.
 - **SocialSecurity.gov Website Redesign** – We implemented a password-protected beta site for SocialSecurity.gov that includes streamlined content and a redesigned home page. We will use customer feedback from online surveys and focus groups to make adjustments to the beta site. We expect to increase the customer satisfaction score for the redesigned website by two points compared to the ssa.gov satisfaction score for the prior year. In FY 2022, we plan to transition the final redesigned ssa.gov website into production. To ensure the website is accessible to individuals with disabilities, the redesign process has included accessibility experts from its inception, and will be tested for Section 508 compliance.
 - **Online “Voice of Customer” Feedback** – We established a centralized feedback collection supporting all service channels. In June 2021, we deployed a “Feedback” option to a number of high-traffic SSA.gov pages. In July 2021, we established an online customer feedback hub and marketed it on our National 800 Number Network and field office phone lines. We will continue marketing this feedback option across all service channels to help us improve service.
- 7. SSA manages the experiences of millions of people seeking support for their disability and retirement statuses. Many of these experiences cross agency boundaries—for example, people with disabilities may start with the Department of Labor, then need help from the Department of Health and Human Services, and finally end up accessing disability benefits from SSA. How is SSA coordinating technology solutions across agency siloes to help people navigate this complex environment successfully?**

We are working to integrate our IT solutions with government-wide strategies, including GSA’s [login.gov](https://www.login.gov) service. By federating and leveraging existing capabilities, we provide broader access to our online services. We also continue to explore opportunities to coordinate technology solutions across government to improve service to the public. For example, we have a longstanding partnership with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) serving mutual customers. To assist people who lost their employer sponsored health coverage during the pandemic, we partnered with CMS to provide policy flexibilities to expand Medicare enrollment options and use digital technology solutions to create an online Medicare Part B application. To make the enrollment process easy for the public, CMS.gov provides a link to the SSA.gov Medicare Part B online application.

Additionally, our Office of the Chief Business Officer (OCBO) is collaborating with other agencies, such as the Veterans Administration, to gain additional insights on how to

successfully integrate and scale up a customer experience management program within our agency. OCBO aims to leverage these relationships with federal partners to improve service. In the future, we look forward to partnering with other agencies or federal portals to share information where it makes sense and resources are available.

As we continue leveraging IT solutions across government, we are committed to making our electronic and information technologies accessible to individuals with disabilities by meeting or exceeding the requirements of Section 508.