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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548



B-164031(4)

JUL 8 1976

The Honorable Frank Church
Chairman, Special Committee on Aging ^{SE 4}
United States Senate ₀₅₅₀₀

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Dear Mr. Chairman:

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Your September 2, 1975, letter requested that we look into certain allegations made by Mr. N. T. Wolkomir, president of the National Federation of Federal Employees, concerning the Social Security Administration. These allegations, primarily directed at Social Security Administration field operations in the Cincinnati, Ohio, area, were that

- progress has not been made to eliminate work backlogs,
- a 54-hour workweek was created by mandatory overtime,
- overtime has demoralized workers, and
- headquarters has resisted the need to increase staffing.

A National Federation of Federal Employees official told us that these allegations were in response to the testimony of the Social Security Administration Commissioner before your committee in May 1975.

There are three Social Security Administration field offices in Cincinnati--the Downtown District Office, the Peebles Corner Branch of the Downtown Office, and the North District Office. There is also a telecommunications center (not included in our review) outside the city, servicing all the field offices in the greater Cincinnati area.

We reviewed selected operations performed from January 1975 through January 1976 by each Cincinnati field office. We met with responsible officials of the 3 field offices, the area director responsible for 20 Social Security Administration offices in Ohio, including those in Cincinnati, the president of local 75 of the National Federation of

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Federal Employees, and the union stewards for the 3 Cincinnati field offices. Local 75 is the exclusive union bargaining agent for Cincinnati field office employees.

As directed by your office, we did not obtain formal agency comments on the matters discussed in this report. We did, however, discuss these matters with Social Security Administration officials who agreed with the information provided.

ALLEGATION THAT PROGRESS HAS NOT BEEN
MADE IN ELIMINATING WORK BACKLOGS

The work measurement system used by the Social Security Administration measures certain workloads, such as the number of Retirement Insurance Benefit and Supplemental Security Income Benefit applications, common to all district and branch offices. The workload is shown as a "receipt" when it is received in the office, "pending" while it is being processed, and "cleared" when the process is finished. The system also provides management with data on staff-hours and the manner in which they were used.

The district offices' various workloads in the receipts, clearances, and pending balances vary from month to month. Staff-hours available to process workloads vary due to staffing changes, leave usage, holidays, and overtime worked.

To determine whether the work situation improved in the three Cincinnati offices, we converted the workloads into work units by multiplying the number of items in each workload in the monthly mixed-workload receipts, clearances, and pending balances of each office by the number of staff-hours the Social Security Administration head quarters estimates it takes to process each workload. A work unit represents 1 hour of average production time. We then analyzed the variances in work units over the 13-month period.

The analysis showed that, although work units received in all three offices increased, the work units processed by each office increased at a greater rate. The North and Peebles Corner Offices had a decrease in work units pending, while work units pending in the Downtown Office increased. Overall, we found that progress has been made toward bringing workloads under control even though the number of work units received by all three offices has increased. The following table is an example of one of the comparisons we made of work units received, cleared, and pending.

	Work in work units		Percent of increase or decrease(-)
	January 1975	January 1976	
Work received:			
Downtown	8,070	8,077	.09
North	4,947	5,479	10.75
Peebles Corner	2,495	2,508	.52
Total	<u>15,512</u>	<u>16,064</u>	3.56
Work processed:			
Downtown	6,642	7,926	19.33
North	4,066	5,486	34.92
Peebles Corner	2,014	2,449	21.59
Total	<u>12,722</u>	<u>15,861</u>	24.67
Work pending (backlog):			
Downtown	5,497	6,624	20.50
North	2,578	2,294	-11.02
Peebles Corner	1,753	999	-43.01
Total	<u>9,828</u>	<u>9,917</u>	- .91

Local Social Security Administration officials attribute the improved work situation to the overall increase in staffing and increased experience of staff members in processing workloads.

ALLEGATION THAT 54-HOUR WORKWEEK
WAS CREATED BY MANDATORY OVERTIME

The Social Security Administration area director said that he receives quarterly overtime allocations from the regional office and that he allocates the overtime to the field offices primarily on the basis of office workload. Each office manager may use his own judgment in allocating overtime. Management personnel and union stewards at the three field offices informed us that overtime worked during 1975 was voluntary, and they generally agreed that the overall usage of overtime has been declining.

We analyzed the overtime work by various categories of employees of the three Cincinnati field offices during the 44-week period from January 5 through November 8, 1975. The average and range of overtime worked according to employee categories are shown below.

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<u>Category</u>	<u>Average weekly overtime</u>			<u>Range of average weekly overtime</u>
	<u>Downtown</u>	<u>Peebles Corner</u>	<u>North</u>	
	(hours)			
Management	4.8	7.7	6.0	2.1 - 8.1
Supervisors	5.2	9.0	4.7	2.4 - 9.0
Claims representatives	4.1	4.0	1.8	0 - 8.5
Service representatives	2.6	4.7	3.3	0 - 8.9
Field representatives	12.1	(a)	5.7	5.7 - 13.6
Development clerks	1.5	1.6	1.4	0 - 5.6
Data recording technicians	2.1	4.8	3.9	0.3 - 6.1
Others	3.8	(a)	2.1	0 - 9.0
All employees	3.5	3.9	2.7	0 - 13.6

a/No employees in the category.

Except for two field representatives in the Downtown Office no employee approached the alleged 14 hours of weekly overtime. The two field representatives told us that their overtime was voluntary.

ALLEGATION THAT OVERTIME
HAS DEMORALIZED WORKERS

Employee morale seemed to vary from office to office and did not appear to be directly related to overtime worked. For example, according to the union steward, the Peebles Corner Office staff worked the most overtime, on the average, but has the highest morale.

We found no evidence that employee morale at the three offices was adversely affected by the amount of overtime worked.

ALLEGATION THAT SOCIAL SECURITY
ADMINISTRATION HEADQUARTERS RESISTED
THE NEED TO INCREASE STAFFING

Since the Supplemental Security Income program was enacted on October 30, 1972, the Congress has authorized the Social Security Administration to increase its staffing by 56 percent as shown on the table on the following page.

<u>FY</u>	<u>Social Security Administration request to HEW</u>	<u>Health, Education, and Welfare request to Office of Management and Budget</u>	<u>President's budget request</u>	<u>Congressional action</u>	<u>Increase over prior year</u>
1972	-	-	-	55,597	-
1973	75,640	75,640	68,340	68,340	12,743
1974	82,592	80,878	76,762	76,762	8,422
1975	80,750	78,189	76,878	76,878	116
1975 Supplemental	89,300	82,578	86,648	86,648	<u>a/3,770</u>
Total					<u><u>31,051</u></u>

a/Included in the 1975 supplemental increase were 6,000 term (not over 2-year employment) and 3,770 temporary (not over 1-year employment) positions.

As indicated in the table, the Social Security Administration has always requested more staff than was contained in the President's budget. The Commissioner mentioned the fiscal year 1975 supplemental request for almost 10,000 additional employees at the hearings before your committee on May 1, 1975. This request was subsequently authorized on June 12, 1975.

Our review shows that staffing increased in all three of the Cincinnati field offices during the 10-month period from January through October 1975. Changes in staffing during this period, exclusive of special employees such as student aids and new employees attending training, were as follows:


<u>Office</u>	<u>On-duty staffing</u>		<u>Percent of increase</u>
	<u>Jan. 1975</u>	<u>Oct. 1975</u>	
Downtown	65	74	14
Peebles Corner	14	20	43
North	<u>52</u>	<u>56</u>	8
Total	<u><u>131</u></u>	<u><u>150</u></u>	15

The Social Security Administration has taken action to increase both its total staffing and the staffing in each of the three Cincinnati field offices.

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We trust that this information will be useful to the committee as it continues to explore issues related to Supplemental Security Income.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James R. Steels".

Comptroller General
of the United States