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Chief Information Officer Open Recommendations: Social Security Administration

I am writing to you both with respect to your roles as the Chief Information Officers (CIO) of the Social Security Administration (SSA). As an independent, non-partisan agency that works for Congress, GAO's mission is to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government. Our work includes investigating matters related to the use of public funds, evaluating programs and activities of the U.S. Government at the request of congressional committees and subcommittees or on the initiative of the Comptroller General, and as required by public laws or committee reports. Our duties include reporting our findings and recommending ways to increase economy and efficiency in government spending. The purpose of this letter is to provide an overview of the open, publicly available GAO recommendations to SSA that call for the attention of the CIOs.

We identified recommendations that relate to the CIOs' roles and responsibilities in effectively managing IT. They include strategic planning, investment management, and information security. We have previously reported on the significance of the CIO's role in improving the government's performance in IT and related information management functions.[1] Your attention to these recommendations will help ensure the secure and effective use of IT at the agency.

Currently, SSA has 11 open recommendations that call for the attention of the CIOs. Each of these recommendations relates to a GAO High-Risk area: (1) Ensuring the Cybersecurity of the Nation or (2) Improving IT Acquisitions and Management.[2] In addition, GAO has designated one

[1]See for example, GAO, *Federal Chief Information Officers: Critical Actions Needed to Address Shortcomings and Challenges in Implementing Responsibilities*, GAO-18-93 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 2, 2018).

[2]GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, GAO-25-107743 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 25, 2025).

of the 11 as a priority recommendation.[3] Fully implementing these open recommendations could significantly improve SSA's ability to deter threats and manage its critical systems, operations, and information. I have summarized selected recommendations here. See the enclosure for a full list, and additional details on the recommendations.

Ensuring the Cybersecurity of the Nation. SSA needs to take additional steps to secure the information systems it uses to carry out its mission. Specifically, we recommended that the agency fully implement all event logging requirements as directed by the Office of Management and Budget. Until SSA does so, there is increased risk that the agency will not have complete information from logs on its systems to detect, investigate, and remediate cyber threats.

Improving IT Acquisitions and Management. SSA needs to take steps to improve its IT operations, including developing a complete inventory of telecommunications assets and more consistently tracking software licenses. For example, we recommended that the CIO verify the completeness of SSA's inventory of current telecommunications assets, and establish a process for ongoing maintenance of the inventory. Until SSA does so, the agency is more likely to experience delays and increased costs during telecommunications contract transitions.

We also recommended that SSA consistently track software licenses that are currently in use and compare its inventories of software licenses in use to purchased licenses. Implementing this recommendation will allow SSA to take advantage of opportunities to reduce costs and better inform its investment decision-making.

Copies of this letter are being sent to the appropriate congressional committees and the Federal CIO. The letter will also be available at no charge on the GAO website at https://www.gao.gov. In addition, we sent a separate letter, related to agency-wide priority recommendations, to the Commissioner of SSA.[4]

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the recommendations outlined in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me at marinosn@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this letter. Our teams will continue to coordinate with your staff on addressing these 11 open recommendations that call for the attention of the CIOs. I appreciate SSA's continued commitment and thank you for your personal attention to these important recommendations.

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[3]Priority recommendations are those that GAO believes warrant priority attention from heads of key departments or agencies. They are highlighted because, upon implementation, they may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue. Since 2015, GAO has sent letters to selected agencies to highlight the importance of implementing such recommendations.

[4]GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Social Security Administration,* GAO-25-108005 (Washington, D.C.: May 22, 2025).

Nick Marinos
Managing Director
Information Technology and Cybersecurity

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Greg Barbaccia, Federal CIO, Office of Management and Budget

Enclosure

Chief Information Officer Open Recommendations to the Social Security Administration

This enclosure includes the open, publicly available GAO recommendations to the Social Security Administration (SSA) that call for the attention of its Chief Information Officers (CIO). We have divided these recommendations into two categories: (1) ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation and (2) improving IT acquisitions and management.

Ensuring the Cybersecurity of the Nation

Federal agencies depend on IT systems to carry out operations and process, maintain, and report essential information. The security of these systems and data is vital to protecting individual privacy and ensuring national security. Table 1 provides information on the open cybersecurity-related recommendation relevant to the SSA CIOs.

Table 1: Open Chief Information Officer-related Cybersecurity Recommendation for the Social Security Administration

GAO report number	GAO report title	Recommendation
GAO-24-105658	Cybersecurity: Federal Agencies Made Progress, but Need to Fully Implement Incident Response Requirements	The Commissioner of the Social Security Administration should ensure that the agency fully implements all event logging requirements as directed by Office of Management and Budget guidance. (Recommendation 20)

Source: GAO summary based on previously issued reports. | GAO-25-108464

Improving IT Acquisitions and Management

Federal IT investments too frequently fail to deliver capabilities in a timely, cost-effective manner. Key management challenges—such as a lack of disciplined project planning and program oversight—continue to hamper effective acquisition and management of the government's IT assets. Table 2 provides information on the open IT acquisition and management-related recommendations relevant to the SSA CIOs.

Table 2: Open Chief Information Officer (CIO)-related IT Acquisition and Management Recommendations for the Social Security Administration (SSA)

GAO report number	GAO report title	Recommendation
GAO-17-464	Telecommunications: Agencies Need to Apply Transition Planning Practices to Reduce Potential Delays and Added Costs	The Commissioner of SSA should ensure that the Administration's CIO verifies the completeness of SSA's inventory of current telecommunications assets and services and establishes a process for ongoing maintenance of the inventory regarding services other than local and long-distance telecommunications. (Recommendation 16)

GAO report number	GAO report title	Recommendation
GAO-24-105717	Federal Software Licenses: Agencies Need to Take Action to Achieve Additional Savings	The Commissioner of SSA should ensure that the agency consistently tracks software licenses that are currently in use for its widely used licenses by, at a minimum, developing and implementing procedures for tracking license usage. (Recommendation 15) The Commissioner of SSA should ensure that the agency consistently compares the inventories of software licenses that are currently in use with information on purchased licenses to identify opportunities to reduce costs and better inform investment decision-making for its widely used licenses on a regular basis. At a minimum, it should develop and implement procedures for comparing the inventories of licenses in use to purchase records. (Recommendation 16)*
GAO-24-106137	Cloud Computing: Agencies Need to Address Key OMB Procurement Requirements	The Commissioner of SSA should ensure that the CIO of SSA updates guidance to put a cloud service level agreement in place with every vendor when a cloud solution is deployed. The guidance should include language that addresses the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) required elements for service level agreements, including clear performance metrics and remediation plans for non-compliance. (Recommendation 45)
GAO-24-106770	Social Security Administration: Actions Needed to Help Ensure Success of Electronic Verification Service	The SSA Commissioner should ensure that the Associate Commissioner of IT Financial Management and Support updates guidance for developing cost estimates for IT investments to incorporate the best practices outlined in GAO's *Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide*. (Recommendation 1) The SSA Commissioner should ensure that the Associate Commissioner of IT Financial Management and Support implements appropriate controls to ensure all significant IT investments follow the Information Technology Investment Process. (Recommendation 2)
GAO-25-107041	IT Portfolio Management: OMB and Agencies Are Not Fully Addressing Selected Statutory Requirements	The Commissioner of SSA should direct its agency CIO to work with OMB to ensure that annual reviews of their IT portfolio are conducted in conjunction with the Federal CIO and the Chief Operating Officer or Deputy Secretary (or equivalent), as prescribed by Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act. (Recommendation 44)

GAO report number	GAO report title	Recommendation
GAO-25-107114	Cloud Computing: Selected Agencies Need to Implement Updated Guidance for Managing Restrictive Licenses	The Commissioner of SSA should update and implement guidance to fully address identifying, analyzing, and mitigating the impacts of restrictive software licensing practices on cloud computing efforts. (Recommendation 11) The Commissioner of SSA should assign and document responsibility for identifying and managing potential impacts of restrictive software licensing practices across the agency. (Recommendation 12)
GAO-25-107179	Internet of Things: Federal Actions Needed to Address Legislative Requirements	The Commissioner of SSA should direct the CIO to establish a plan and time frame for completing the covered Internet of Things inventory, as directed by OMB. (Recommendation 10)

Source: GAO summary based on previously issued reports. | GAO-25-108464
*Indicates a priority recommendation.