



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D C 20548

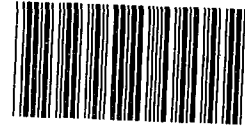
HUMAN RESOURCES
DIVISION

B-164031(4)

SEP 4 1979

A
The Honorable Abraham Ribicoff
Chairman, Committee on
Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

SEN 06600



110322

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Subject: [Followup on Computer Security at the
Social Security Administration]
(HRD-79-114)

AGC00026

Your March 9, 1978, letter relating to our report to the Social Security Administration on computer security at its headquarters (HRD-78-73, Feb. 21, 1978) requested that we report to you on Social Security's improvements after an appropriate length of time. On April 25, 1978, the Social Security Administration informed us of actions taken to correct the problems we identified. (See enc. I.) Since that time, we have verified that Social Security has acted on each of our recommendations.

On June 5, 1978, we issued a report to Congressmen[✓] John E. Moss and Charles Rose (HRD-78-116) which we are including for your information as enclosure II. The Congressmen requested an evaluation of the security procedures Social Security used to protect beneficiary records. They were interested in both automated records and hard copy folders located in field offices, private insurance companies, and State disability determination offices.

We reported on several management problems leading to possible misuse, abuse, or destruction of Social Security beneficiary records. The June 5 report discussed the limited safeguards provided by Social Security to protect both automated beneficiary records and documents supporting beneficiary claims. Some of the more significant issues were (1) unlimited and unrestricted access to terminals, (2) ability to create as well as query beneficiary files from most terminals, (3) failure to use audit trail features within the system, (4) failure to always lock terminals during nonworking hours, (5) safeguarding

(990515)

006942 / HRD-79-114
110322

B-164031(4)

beneficiary data sent to Federal and State agencies and private contractors, (6) storage of claimant files in field offices, and (7) security background checks on field office employees.

On March 20, 1979, the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare notified us of the corrective actions being taken to solve the problems identified in our June 5 report. (See enc. III.) Also, we have received three additional congressional requests to follow up on the information provided in this report and to investigate other aspects of security over Social Security Administration data records. In response to one of these requests, we reported on the feasibility of monitoring incoming public telephone calls at the Social Security Administration's Teleservice Centers. A copy of this recently issued report (HRD-79-62, May 1, 1979) is included as enclosure IV. The results of the remaining requests will be provided to your Committee upon completion of the work.


In addition, the Office of Management and Budget on July 27, 1978, issued Transmittal Memorandum No. 1 to its Circular A-71, which sets up a Federal computer security program designed to prevent the illegal use of information stored in computers and deter fraud and misuse. Under this program, all executive branch department and agencies are required to establish a management control and audit process for sensitive computer applications, appoint a security official at each computer facility, screen employees involved in the design and operation of sensitive information systems, and perform periodic risk analyses for each computer installation operated by the agency at least every 5 years. Many of the Office of Management and Budget requirements parallel recommendations made in our February 21, and June 5, 1978, reports.

Hopefully, our reports, along with the Office of Management and Budget requirements, will not only result in corrective action being taken at the Social Security Administration, but also provide the impetus for correcting

B-164031(4)

similar problems in other Federal agencies. We will continue to monitor Social Security actions to implement improvements in computer security as part of our ongoing work at the agency.

Sincerely yours,



Gregory J. Chart
Director

Enclosures - 4