

Frequently Asked Questions: Evolving Policies and Procedures at SSA During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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How can I get an in-person appointment at my local Social Security Administration (SSA) office?

On October 22, 2020, SSA revised the information available on its [COVID-19 webpage](#) about who is eligible for an in-person appointment while its local offices generally remain closed to the public due to the pandemic. They divide their instructions into 1) those who need help with their benefits, and 2) those who need help with a Social Security number (SSN).

For those who need help with their benefits:

Generally, SSA will schedule an in-person appointment for those “in dire need situations.” SSA defines dire need as when an individual:

- is without food or shelter, including utilities, or is without medical care or coverage and needs to apply for or reinstate benefits from SSA; or
- currently receives benefits from SSA and has an urgent need for payment to meet expenses for food, shelter, or medical treatment, and the individual cannot receive a payment from SSA electronically.

For those who need help with a Social Security number:

SSA is prioritizing requests for in-person SSN services for:

- Individuals age 12 or older applying for their first SSN card.
- Individuals who need to update or correct their SSN information (such as their name, date of birth, or citizenship) to obtain income, resources, or medical care or coverage, or other services or benefits (for example filing a tax return, applying for housing, or seeking an Economic Impact Payment).

SSA encourages those who don't fit into one of these priority situations to request a replacement SSN card through an online my Social Security account, or by mailing an application for a Social Security card ([Form SS-5](#)) to their local office, along with original documents to prove their identity, with the assurance that these documents will be mailed back to the individual.

However, SSA concedes that since there are “delays processing mail-in SSN card applications, it may take us between two and four weeks to process the application and return the evidence.” In many states, individuals will be punished if they are found to be driving without having their driver's license on their person, and the law prohibits immigrants from having their immigration documents out of their possession. SSA's [POMS](#) on the requirements for replacing an SSN card contains this warning:

CAUTION

Never ask a noncitizen applicant to mail his or her immigration document to SSA. Under the law, noncitizens 18 years of age or older in the U.S. must have immigration documentation in their possession at all times. If they do not, they are subject to fine and/or imprisonment.

Can I fax and email required documentation to Social Security Administration (SSA)?

SSA is happy to accept information by fax. You can find the fax number for the relevant local office using the [Office Locator](#). This provides the electronic fax number for the local office, not a “paper” fax number.

However, SSA is adamant about **not** receiving personal identifying information (PII, i.e., name, date of birth, Social Security number) over email. While there are very limited circumstances when an SSA employee will send out an encrypted email that contains PII to an individual or their representative, SSA’s policy is not to receive emails with PII, even if it is encrypted.

Also, keep in mind that any information sent by fax to SSA is considered to be a copy, not an original document.

How do you find the district manager for a local SSA office?

There isn’t a simple place to get a list of SSA office staff, including managers. You can start by calling the local office and asking for the name and contact information for the manager. If they are not helpful, try to reach out to the Area Office and speak to them. The Area Office is the non-public facing office that supervises local offices on operations issues. Getting that address and phone number is not simple. A good place to start is to request it from the Regional Office. You might also try writing a letter addressed to the District Manager (without a name), introducing your agency, what you do, and why you’d like to have a relationship with the local SSA office.

How does a representative get access to a client’s eFolder?

Access to documents in the eFolder at the initial and reconsideration levels in a claim for disability benefits is now available to all appointed representatives who are already registered for eFolder access at the ALJ hearing and Appeals Council levels, once SSA has received and processed their [Form SSA-1696](#) (Appointment of Representative) for that client whose claim is pending at the initial or reconsideration level. SSA will continue the current process of registering representatives who have at least one case pending at the ALJ hearings level. The [SSA website](#) has information about signing up with SSA to access clients’ eFolders.

Representatives who are only appointed to cases at the initial and reconsideration levels are not eligible to register for eFolder access at this time. SSA anticipates expanding eFolder access to representatives who are only appointed to cases at the initial and reconsideration levels in the future, but they have not yet announced a time frame for when that might happen.

Reminder: you must submit your Form SSA-1696 to the local SSA office, not to your state’s Disability Determination Service (DDS), to gain access to the eFolder. Even though you will be gaining access to the file at DDS, it is the local SSA office that processes the Form SSA-1696 to accomplish this.

Does the new “streamlined” waiver process cover situations where the individual reported their income to SSA earlier in 2020, but the local SSA office did not process that information until now?

An overpayment would “qualify” for the new streamlined waiver process if the overpayment accrued between March 1, 2020 and Sept 30, 2020, and SSA coded that overpayment in their systems as resulting from the agency deferring action on the individual’s report about their income. Once they got the notice of overpayment, the individual would have to call SSA to request that the overpayment be waived.

What about someone who was overpaid in 2019, and just got a notice of overpayment in July 2020 that they were overpaid in 2019 on account of their earnings in 2019?

No, this person would not qualify for the streamlined waiver process.

What kind of confirmation will an individual get from SSA that the streamlined waiver has been requested?

Individuals will not get a written acknowledgement from SSA that they have requested a waiver through this streamlined process. However, they must get a written decision, as with any waiver request, and that written decision must contain information about the individual's appeal rights.

In addition, the overpayment cannot be collected while their waiver request is pending; however, they wouldn't be able to show that they have made a waiver request through the streamlined process and that the overpayment should not be collected, since they don't have anything in writing showing that the request was made.

Case consultation assistance is available for attorneys and professionals seeking more information to help older adults. Contact NCLER at ConsultNCLER@acl.hhs.gov.

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