



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SECURITY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATIONS, INC.

3303 SOUTH WAKEFIELD STREET
SUITE 103

ARLINGTON, VA 22206

TELEPHONE: (202) 547-8530

FAX: (571) 312-2333

www.ncssma.org

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Vancouver, WA

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New Brunswick, NJ

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RACHEL EMMONS
Phone: (202) 547-8530

rachele@greystone-group.com

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Ms. Nancy Berryhill
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Nancy:

This week has been a very challenging week for Field Offices (FOs) throughout the country. Because of the problems associated with the MSSICS upgrade and iSSI release, FOs have been struggling to serve customers and process program integrity workloads. We received reports that:

- Screen transition within MSSICS is very slow.
- Numerous edits are occurring and there are no known workarounds.
- Significant time is being spent re-contacting claimants because of these MSSICS upgrade problems and because iSSI claims are missing key information entered by the claimants.

Communications to FOs regarding these issues have been slow in coming. We understand over 800 vHelp programmatic support requests have been submitted.

This upgrade occurred during the first full week of the month when FOs experience the heaviest walk-in traffic and telephone calls. In addition, FO technicians must ensure that critical inputs are completed before today's Goldberg-Kelly cut off, in order to avoid incorrect or erroneous payments being issued the following month. These system problems have frustrated our customers and our employees. We recognize there is a need to upgrade our programs, but these upgrades need to be done more seamlessly. We have the following suggestions to address the immediate situation and future releases:

- Form a centralized team that is adequately staffed in advance of a release to handle the volume of anticipated issues that may arise. This team would send out regular communications to the FOs keeping all employees informed of the issues with the releases and the various workarounds. This team would also work closely with Systems providing the necessary information on what needs to be addressed.

- Create a central website where FOs can see what vHelp questions have been reported and what workarounds are available. The PPL website has not kept up with all vHelp submissions coming in. The KCNet site has posted information, but it also hasn't kept up. SSAalert postings have been sporadic. These sites are all very useful, but they need to be more robust and updated in real-time.
- Release large upgrades during weeks that would have less impact on customer service should issues arise.
- Ensure that more advance testing of releases is performed prior to the release whenever possible. It is our understanding that there was limited advance testing of the iSSI release.
- Advise the field and all affected components about potential problems that may arise from any future releases and possible options for workarounds in advance of the release.

The release of the MSSICS upgrade and iSSI is much like that of eRPS where we encountered significant issues and road blocks to processing representative payee applications. The difference is that eRPS is just a small universe of the actions taken in the FO on a daily basis. MSSICS however, is an application used for approximately 50% of our walk-in traffic nationally, as well as in our backend work.

We would appreciate any support you can provide to address the current situation and improve how the agency approaches such upgrades in the future. Thank you in advance for your consideration of our comments, and we look forward to working with you on this.

Sincerely,

Christopher Detzler
NCSSMA President