



# Office of the Inspector General

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

## *Audit Report*

### The Office of Hearings Operations' Use of Video and Telephone Hearings

*A-05-18-50615 July 2022*



# Office of the Inspector General

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** July 15, 2022

**Refer to:** A-05-18-50615

**To:** Kilolo Kijakazi  
Acting Commissioner

**From:** Gail S. Ennis,   
Inspector General

**Subject:** The Office of Hearings Operations' Use of Video and Telephone Hearings

The attached final report presents the results of the Office of Audit's review. The objective was to determine the extent to which the Office of Hearings Operations used video and telephone hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you wish to discuss the final report, please contact Michelle L. Anderson, Assistant Inspector General for Audit.

Attachment

# The Office of Hearings Operations' Use of Video and Telephone Hearings

## A-05-18-50615



July 15, 2022

Office of Audit Report Summary

### Objective

To determine the extent to which the Office of Hearings Operations (OHO) used video and telephone hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Background

OHO directs a nation-wide organization of hearing offices staffed with administrative law judges (ALJ), managers, and support staff.

Before March 2020, the Social Security Administration (SSA) was scheduling the parties to hearings to appear by video; in-person; or, in limited circumstances, by telephone. In January 2016, SSA issued its first plan for Compassionate And REsponsive Service (CARES), with the initiative to hold more hearings via video-teleconference (VTC).

In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, SSA closed its hearing offices to the public for all in-person services. Beginning March 30, 2020, SSA only offered hearings via telephone. In August 2020, SSA piloted online video hearings (OVH) in which claimants participated from their homes or their representatives' offices using Internet-based videoconferencing software. OHO began in-person and VTC hearings in March 2022 for priority cases.

### Results

OHO's use of video and telephone hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed hearings to continue while hearing offices were closed to the public.

**Hearings During the Pandemic.** OHO held approximately 460,000 hearings from April 2020 to March 2021—20 percent fewer than the previous 12 months. OHO also received 21 percent fewer hearing requests and reduced pending hearings by 22 percent over the same period. The downward trend in hearings held, requested, and pending continued through March 2022.

**Online Video Hearings.** While most hearings during the pandemic were held via telephone, over 40,000 claimants had used the OVH option by March 2022.

**Processing Times.** Average processing time was 333 days from April 2020 through March 2021, down from an average of 445 days in the previous 12 months. The decrease likely occurred, in part, because OHO received fewer hearings requests during the pandemic. However, average processing time was decreasing before the pandemic because of increased hiring.

**Quality.** SSA had review processes and conducted studies to evaluate the quality of in-person, VTC, and telephone hearings and has found no differences in quality.

**VTC Equipment.** Although OHO has a process for determining where to place VTC equipment, there were 39 VTC units worth hundreds of thousands of dollars sitting idle in hearing offices around the country even before the pandemic. While the use of VTC hearings was increasing before the pandemic, their use, along with telephone hearings and OVHs, could become more critical in the future.

### Recommendation

We recommended SSA review the 39 underused VTC units we identified and consider whether it should relocate or remove the equipment. SSA agreed with our recommendation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Objective.....	1
Background.....	1
Results of Review .....	2
Hearings During the COVID-19 Pandemic .....	3
Online Video Hearings.....	5
Average Processing Times.....	6
Quality.....	7
In-Line Quality Reviews.....	7
Appeals Council Reviews .....	7
Office of Quality Review Studies.....	7
Video-teleconferencing Equipment Use and Cost .....	8
Recommendation.....	10
Agency Comments.....	10
Appendix A – Scope and Methodology .....	A-1
Appendix B – Hearings During Fiscal Years 2016 And 2019.....	B-1
Appendix C – Average Processing Times During Fiscal Years 2016 And 2019.....	C-1
Appendix D – Video-teleconference Hearing Rates by Region.....	D-1
Appendix E – Video-teleconference Hearing Rates by Hearing Office .....	E-1
Appendix F – Agency Comments.....	F-1

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ALJ	Administrative Law Judge
CARES	Compassionate And REsponsive Service
C.F.R.	Code of Federal Regulations
CPMS	Case Processing and Management System
FY	Fiscal Year
NHC	National Hearing Center
OHO	Office of Hearings Operations
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
OQR	Office of Quality Review
OVH	Online Video Hearings
SSA	Social Security Administration
VTC	Video-teleconference

## OBJECTIVE

To determine the extent to which the Office of Hearings Operations (OHO) used video and telephone hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## BACKGROUND

The Social Security Administration's (SSA) OHO directs a nation-wide hearing office organization staffed with administrative law judges (ALJ), managers, and support staff. In addition, SSA has five National Hearing Centers (NHC) that hold predominantly video-teleconference (VTC) hearings to assist backlogged offices.<sup>1</sup> ALJs at hearing offices and NHCs conduct hearings and adjudicate appealed determinations that involve Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance benefits and Supplemental Security Income payments.<sup>2</sup>

Before March 2020, SSA was scheduling parties to hearings to appear by VTC; in-person; or, in limited circumstances, by telephone.<sup>3</sup> VTC hearings were conducted by ALJs in hearing offices or NHCs while the other parties connected from a separate location, such as a different hearing office or representative's office. SSA decided how parties appeared at hearings based on several factors. According to SSA, it defaulted to in-person hearings but gave the parties the option to have a VTC hearing, to which they could opt out. In January 2016, SSA issued its first plan for Compassionate And REsponsive Service (CARES), with the initiative to hold more hearings via VTC.<sup>4</sup> In an update to the plan, SSA stated it expected that expanding VTC hearings would improve “. . . service delivery capability by maximizing [the] ability to balance workloads nationally and provide more timely service to claimants in offices with the longest wait times.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The five NHCs are in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Baltimore, Maryland; Chicago, Illinois; Falls Church, Virginia; and St. Louis, Missouri.

<sup>2</sup> The Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance program provides benefits to wage earners and their families who meet certain criteria in the event the wage earner retires, becomes disabled, or dies. 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.310, 404.315, 404.330, 404.335, 404.350, 404.370. The Supplemental Security Income program provides payments to financially needy individuals who are aged, blind, or disabled. 20 C.F.R. § 416.110. SSA's administrative review process generally consists of an initial determination, a reconsideration, a hearing before an ALJ, and an Appeals Council review. 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.900(a) and 416.1400(a). Also, see 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.929, 404.930, 416.1429, and 416.1430.

<sup>3</sup> 20 CFR 404.936(c) and 416.1436(c).

<sup>4</sup> SSA, *Compassionate And REsponsive Service (CARES) Plan: January 2016*, pp. 3 and 10.

<sup>5</sup> SSA, *Compassionate And REsponsive Service (CARES) Plan: 2018-2019 Update*, p. 9.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. On March 17, 2020, SSA closed Social Security hearing offices to the public for all in-person services, including in-person and VTC hearings. Beginning March 30, 2020, SSA only offered hearings via telephone. In August 2020, SSA piloted online video hearings (OVH) in which ALJs, claimants, and representatives participated in hearings using Internet-based videoconferencing software.<sup>6</sup> OHO rolled this option out nationwide in December 2020. OHO began in-person and VTC<sup>7</sup> hearings in March 2022 for priority cases and plans to continue offering and scheduling hearings via OVH and telephone.

To review OHO's hearings, we obtained data extracts and management information reports from OHO's Case Processing and Management System (CPMS). This included all cases where OHO issued a decision after an in-person, VTC,<sup>8</sup> telephone, or OVH hearing; a favorable decision based only on the evidence in the file without holding a hearing (known as an "on-the-record" decision); or a dismissal of the request for hearing. We also obtained information on internal quality reviews of hearings and VTC equipment use and costs.<sup>9</sup>

## RESULTS OF REVIEW

OHO's use of video and telephone hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed hearings to continue while hearing offices were closed to the public. Because of the additional technical and training requirements to hold telephone hearings and OVHs, along with some claimants and representatives opting to wait for in-person hearings, OHO held 20 percent fewer hearings during the pandemic months of April 2020 through March 2021 as compared to the previous 12 months. While overall hearings declined, pending hearings decreased by 22 percent in the same period. This occurred partly because OHO received 21 percent fewer hearings requests after processing times at disability determination services increased, which resulted in delayed appeals. The downward trend in hearings held, requested, and pending continued through March 2022.

While SSA resumed in-person and VTC hearings to a limited extent, initially for priority cases, in March 2022, it has continued offering OVHs and telephone hearings as options. SSA aims to expand its hearing capacity during the pandemic and once hearing offices re-open, which is in line with the CARES Plan initiative to balance workloads nationally and provide more timely service. However, the prevalence of OVHs, VTC hearings, and telephone hearings depends on the claimants' and representatives' willingness to use these hearings options.

---

<sup>6</sup> During an OVH, the ALJ conducts the hearing from a private room in his/her residence using a secure Internet connection.

<sup>7</sup> SSA stated it resumed limited VTC hearings in the event a claimant in a critical case category had not objected to a VTC hearing and SSA determines that conducting a VTC hearing is more efficient.

<sup>8</sup> OHO considers a hearing to be held by VTC if any party to the hearing participated by video, regardless of whether the hearing was with an ALJ at a hearing office or NHC.

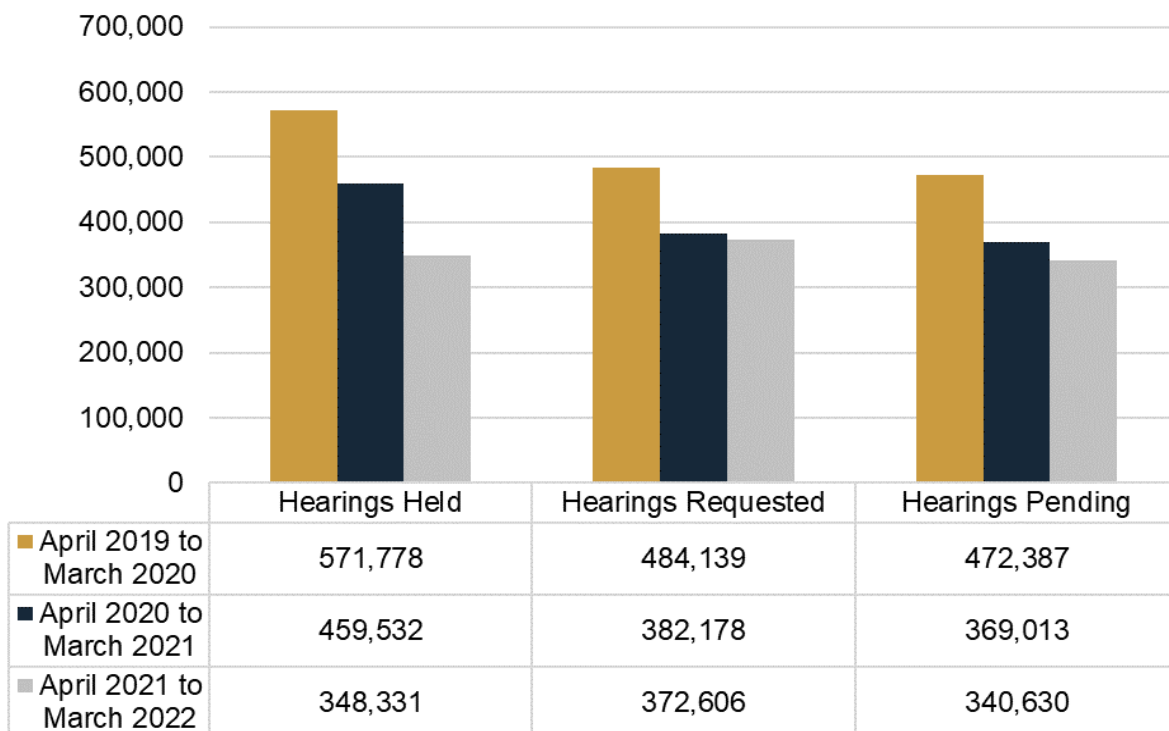
<sup>9</sup> See Appendix A for the scope and methodology of our review.

## Hearings During the COVID-19 Pandemic

OHO held approximately 460,000 hearings, nearly all of which were via telephone, from April 2020 to March 2021—a decline from the previous 12 months (see Figure 1).<sup>10</sup> At the same time, OHO received fewer hearing requests, as compared to the prior 12-month period, a trend that continued through March 2022. Fewer hearing requests, along with claimants and representatives waiting for in-person hearings, led to a decline in the number of cases available to schedule and thus hearings held through March 2022.

While hearing requests had been trending downward before the pandemic, delays at the disability determination services during the pandemic could have contributed to fewer hearing requests. In a prior report,<sup>11</sup> we found processing time for claimants to receive reconsideration determinations from disability determination services increased during the pandemic. Claimants must generally receive a reconsideration determination before they file an appeal to OHO.

**Figure 1: Number of Hearings Held, Requested, and Pending  
April 2019 Through March 2022**



**Source:** OIG analysis of CPMS Management Information.

**Note:** Hearings Pending is the number of hearings as of the last month for each period.

<sup>10</sup> The number of hearings held was increasing before the pandemic, see Appendix B.

<sup>11</sup> SSA, OIG, *Comparing the Social Security Administration's Disability Determination Services' Workload Statistics During the COVID-19 Pandemic to Prior Years*, A-01-21-51038, pp. 4 and 7 (December 2021).



SSA's response to the COVID-19 pandemic created new work processes, including using Agency staff to:

- serve as remote verbatim hearing reporters, work traditionally performed by contract employees;<sup>12</sup>
- conduct additional followups to obtain medical evidence since many medical offices and hospitals were understaffed or closed;
- reach out to claimants to obtain consent and availability to appear at telephone hearings or OVHs;
- scan and associate mail, develop paper cases for hearings, and conduct other non-portable work;<sup>13</sup> and
- call unrepresented claimants to ensure they understand the available options for appearing at telephone hearings or OVHs, their right to representation, and the contents of their files, including any outstanding evidence.

Not only did the transition to telephone hearings, and later OVHs, require additional training, communication, and technology enhancements for OHO, many claimants voluntarily postponed their hearings until in-person services could resume. In November 2020, the Government Accountability Office reported<sup>14</sup> that, early in the pandemic, 25 percent of claimants chose to decline their telephone hearings, but, by October 2020, only 10 percent had declined telephone hearings.

---

<sup>12</sup> A hearing reporter records the hearing.

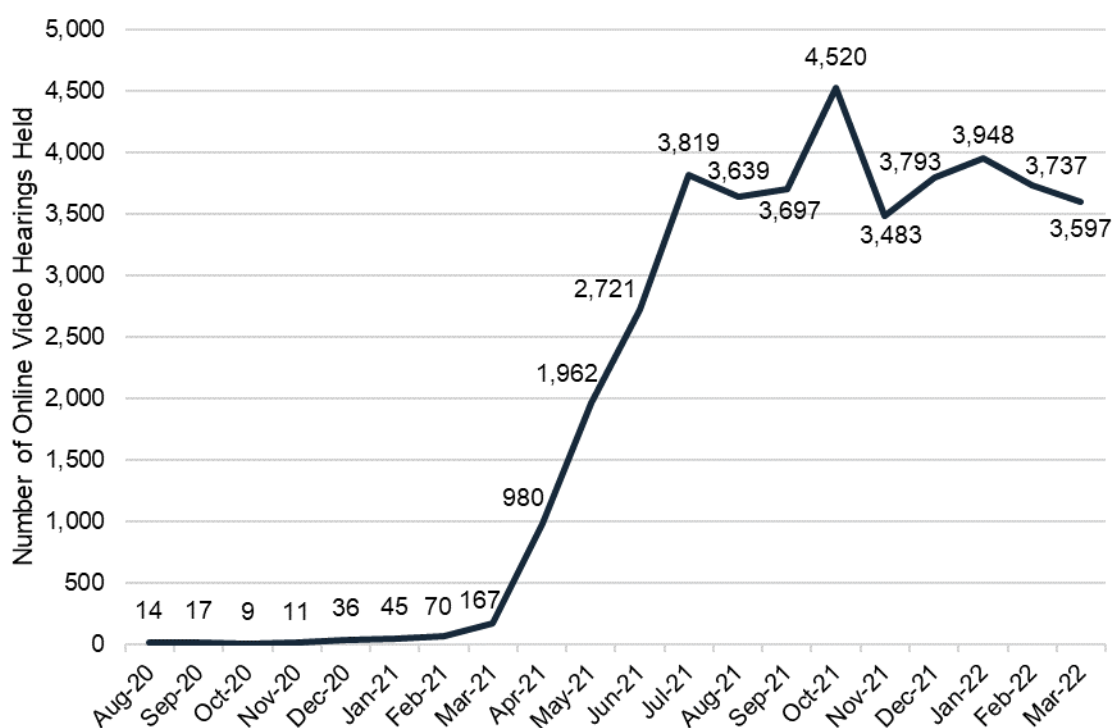
<sup>13</sup> According to SSA, hearing offices suspended some paper-based workloads in March 2020 because those workloads required staff to be in the office to develop the cases for hearings. In June 2020, SSA resumed processing non-disability paper workloads in the hearings operation. Hearing office managers scan paper-based workloads into electronic formats, allowing staff to develop these cases remotely.

<sup>14</sup> Government Accountability Office, *COVID-19 Urgent Actions Needed to Better Ensure an Effective Federal Response*, GAO-21-191 pp. 239 and 381 (November 2020).

## Online Video Hearings

While the number of overall hearings declined during the pandemic, OHO's use of OVHs increased since August 2020, as shown in Figure 2. By March 2022, over 40,000 claimants had taken advantage of the OVH option.

**Figure 2: Online Video Hearings Held  
August 2020 Through March 2022**



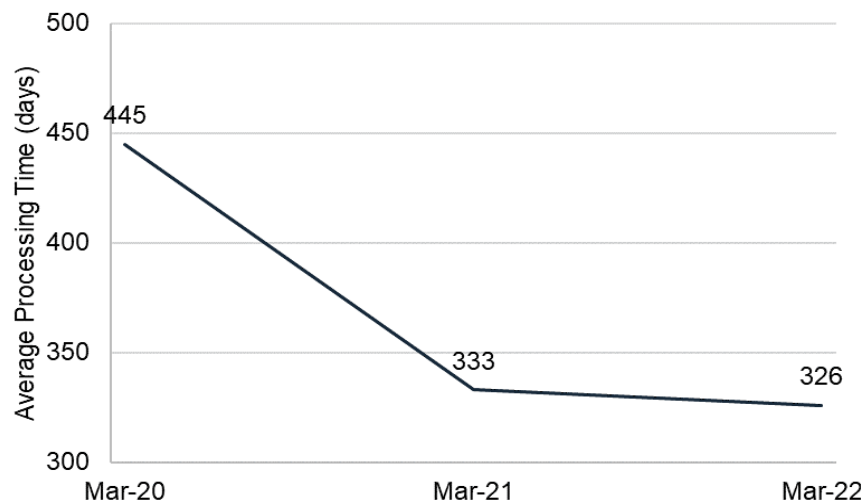
**Source:** SSA, OHO.

In July 2021, SSA began sending surveys to claimants who participated in an OVH, asking them about their experience with the technology and new hearing option. As of December 2021, SSA had sent 12,395 surveys and received 2,711 responses—89.6 percent of the survey responses were positive. Feedback from claimants providing low scores related to missing or unclear instructions and audio or video issues. In August 2021, SSA sent approximately 11,000 surveys to garner feedback from claimant representatives and others appealing a decision. SSA received 96 responses, 53.3 percent of which were positive on OVHs. Feedback from this group related to technical issues, some claimants' inability to participate from their homes, and issues with instructions. SSA plans to continue sending surveys to claimants and representatives through May 2022. According to SSA, it decided to end the surveys because the number of responses and any new type of feedback it received began to decrease. According to SSA, it has other surveys through which it obtains feedback on the hearings process in general.

## Average Processing Times

Average processing time for hearings decreased during the pandemic (see Figure 3). The decline in average processing time likely occurred, in part, because OHO received fewer hearing requests (see Figure 1). However, average processing time was decreasing before the pandemic.<sup>15</sup> According to SSA, one factor that contributed to the decrease in processing times was OHO's hiring of ALJs, decision writers, and support staff before the pandemic.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 3: Average Processing Time  
March 2020 Through March 2022**



**Source:** OIG analysis of CPMS Management Information.

**Note:** We calculated average processing time for March 2020, March 2021, and March 2022 by averaging the processing time for the preceding 12 months.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix C for average processing times during FYs 2016 and 2019.

<sup>16</sup> OHO hired approximately 600 ALJs since 2016. OHO also hired over 500 decision writers and 170 support staff in FY 2018. SSA, *Compassionate And Responsive Service (CARES) Plan: 2018-2019 Update*, p. 1.

# Quality

## ***In-Line Quality Reviews***

According to OHO, it uses the same in-line quality review process regardless of how an ALJ conducts a hearing and has found no difference in quality. Under this process, OHO performs policy-compliance reviews to ensure:

- proper documentation of video and telephone hearing declinations,
- all evidence is maintained in the file, and
- a digital recording is uploaded into the electronic folder.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, on August 31, 2020, OHO focused in-line quality reviews to dismissals.

## ***Appeals Council Reviews***

SSA's Appeals Council reviews appealed ALJ decisions and dismissals, regardless of hearing format, to determine whether there is an error of law, the decision is supported by substantial evidence, the ALJ appears to have abused their discretion, or there is a broad policy or procedural issue that may affect general public interest.<sup>17</sup> SSA uses these reviews to help monitor the quality of ALJs' decisions. In FY 2019, the Appeals Council concluded the ALJ decisions or dismissals for 85.8 percent of all hearings and 86.8 percent of VTC hearings were supported by substantial evidence and contained no error of law or abuse of discretion.

## ***Office of Quality Review Studies***

In FY 2017, the Office of Quality Review (OQR) conducted a one-time study<sup>18</sup> of 320 sampled hearings decisions issued between October 2016 and January 2017. OQR agreed with 95.6 percent of sampled cases with similar results between in-person and VTC hearings. For example, of the decisions found to have lack of substantial evidence, six had an in-person hearing and five were held by VTC. Of the hearings with decisional deficiencies, two were in-person and one was held by VTC.

---

<sup>17</sup> 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.970, 416.1470.

<sup>18</sup> SSA, Office of Budget, Finance, Quality, and Management, Office of Quality Review, *Fiscal Year 2017 Video Teleconferencing Report, Administrative Law Judge Hearing Decisions* (September 2017). The Agency's key focus was the quality of ALJ decisions for both in-person and VTC hearings. SSA reviewed other areas, such as the use of expert witnesses in both in-person and VTC hearings. SSA also studied claim types and body systems but was limited to showing the percentages by in-person and VTC hearings.

In a FY 2021 national quality review,<sup>19</sup> OQR sampled 480 FY 2020 hearings decisions to:

- determine whether the decisions complied with the *Social Security Act*, regulations, rulings, and policy;
- identify differences in problematic areas within the 3 hearing modes and alert OHO to any specific concerns; and
- provide feedback on the quality of the audio for all modes of hearings.

The study included samples of in-person and VTC hearings held before March 2020 and telephone hearings conducted after May 2020 with decisions issued by September 2020. OQR found no statistically significant differences between telephone, in-person, and VTC hearings. OQR agreed with 96.5 percent of all decisions, with similar results between in-person and VTC hearings. For example, OQR disagreed with 17 cases, which involved 6 telephone hearings, 6 in-person hearings, and 5 VTC hearings.

## Video-teleconferencing Equipment Use and Cost

Before FY 2020, to address increased use of VTC hearings,<sup>20</sup> OHO expanded VTC hearing capacity by refreshing equipment and ensuring hearing offices were equipped with video functionality.<sup>21</sup> OHO typically refreshed video equipment after a 5-year life cycle dependent on available funding.<sup>22</sup> The Office of the Chief ALJ worked with regional offices and OHO facilities staff to determine the need and location for video equipment. According to SSA, when an office or region identifies the need for additional video capacity, such as when an office or region experiences an increase in receipts, it reviews the use of existing units across OHO to determine whether to move any units to improve service. According to OHO, as of May 2022, all hearing offices had the necessary video equipment to conduct VTC hearings, no equipment became obsolete during the pandemic, and there was no need to further expand.

For VTC hearings, OHO uses three configurations for video equipment units, which can be customized to accommodate room size or specific user needs. All three configurations allow the ALJ or hearing reporter to use a remote control to begin and end VTC hearings as well as pan and zoom the cameras.

1. For large hearing rooms, a system with a color monitor up to 65 inches; a camera; and a stand, wall, or mobile-stand mount. This system costs \$12,000.
2. For smaller hearing rooms or offices, a desktop video system with a pin camera mounted in the top of a 27-inch monitor. This system costs \$8,000.

---

<sup>19</sup> SSA, Office of Analytics, Review and Oversight, *Fiscal Year 2020 Comparison Study of Telephone, Video, and In-Person Hearings* (December 2021).

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix B for our analysis of hearings during Fiscal Years 2016 and 2019.

<sup>21</sup> SSA refreshed video equipment in September 2019.

<sup>22</sup> According to SSA, should funding not be available at the 5-year cycle, the equipment is still viable and useful because SSA maintains the equipment through a maintenance contract. The current maintenance contract expires in March 2028.

3. A utility cart that can move from room to room with a 32-inch monitor, separate camera, and microphone and speaker that can be placed on a desk. This system costs \$11,000.

According to OHO, it is examining other solutions that will allow ALJs to connect to existing VTC equipment in the hearing offices from their work laptops. If a claimant opts for a traditional VTC hearing, this desktop application is an option for ALJs to conduct a hearing from a remote location.

In FY 2019, 39 (3 percent) of 1,385 VTC units in hearing offices were used only once or not at all (see Table 1).<sup>23</sup> SSA stated that, as the number of pending claims at OHO decreased, VTC units became under-used. According to SSA, before the pandemic, many hearing offices had had excess units and SSA was working to redistribute them for better use.

**Table 1: OHO VTC Equipment Use in Hearing Offices  
FY 2019**

Number of Times OHO Used VTC Equipment	Number of Units	Percent
0 or 1	39	3
2 to 100	433	31
101 to 200	340	25
201 to 500	461	33
More than 500	112	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,385</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** OIG analysis of FY 2019 CPMS data.

Some VTC units sat idle even before the pandemic. In FY 2019, OHO used 27 desktop video units and 12 large video units only once or not at all, representing \$360,000 in under-used equipment.<sup>24</sup> In April 2011,<sup>25</sup> we recommended SSA periodically evaluate equipment requirements at each location against historical and expected use before new video hearing equipment is ordered. While SSA responded that a practice was already in place, we found equipment remained unused through FY 2019. While VTC hearings were increasing before the pandemic, their use, along with telephone hearings and OVHs, could become more critical in the future.

---

<sup>23</sup> Historically, OHO has had un- or rarely-used video equipment. For example, in FY 2016, there were 45 units, 4 percent of all video equipment, that OHO had not used or used only once. Our analysis excludes VTC equipment at jails, representatives' offices, and other locations outside SSA's purview. We also excluded VTC equipment located in Regional or Hearing Office Chief ALJs' offices because SSA stated those units were used primarily for other video-conferencing purposes and not primarily for holding hearings. Regional and Hearing Office Chief ALJs handle administrative and supervisory duties and typically hold fewer hearings than line ALJs.

<sup>24</sup> In FY 2019, OHO had 342 desktop units and 1,043 large video units used primarily for holding hearings.

<sup>25</sup> SSA, OIG, *Use of Video Hearings to Reduce the Hearing Case Backlog*, A-05-08-18070, p. 14 (April 2011).

## **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend SSA review the 39 underused VTC units we identified and consider whether it should relocate or remove the equipment.

## **AGENCY COMMENTS**

SSA agreed with our recommendation. See Appendix F for the full text of SSA's comments.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle L. Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michelle L. Anderson  
Assistant Inspector General for Audit

# ***APPENDICES***



## Appendix A – SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

---

To accomplish our objective, we:

- Reviewed applicable sections of the *Social Security Act* as well as the Social Security Administration’s (SSA) regulations, rules, policies, and procedures.
- Obtained and analyzed Case Processing and Management System (CPMS) Management Information reports related to all hearings from April 2019 through March 2022.
- Obtained from SSA information on online video hearings.
- Obtained information from Office of Hearings Operations’ (OHO) on internal quality reviews and survey or feedback on quality.
- Reviewed CPMS Management Information reports on video-teleconference (VTC) equipment use in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. We also obtained information from OHO on cost, return on investment, and OHO’s methods for determining where to place video equipment units and when to replace units at hearing offices and National Hearing Centers.
- Obtained data extracts of 637,473<sup>1</sup> and 793,863 dispositions from CPMS for FYs 2016 and 2019, respectively. This included all appeals where OHO issued a favorable, partially favorable, or unfavorable decision after a hearing; issued a favorable decision without a hearing based on the evidence in the file (known as an “on-the-record” decision); or dismissed the request for hearing. We analyzed the data and OHO’s CPMS Management Information reports to:
  - Identify the number of hearings conducted in-person and by VTC at hearing offices and National Hearing Centers.<sup>2</sup> We calculated VTC hearing rates by dividing the number of VTC hearings by hearings held. We calculated average VTC hearing rates by region and hearing office.
  - Calculate and compared average processing time.

We conducted our review between January 2021 and January 2022. We determined the data used for this audit were sufficiently reliable to meet our objective. The principal entity audited was the Office of Hearings Operations. We assessed the significance of internal controls necessary to satisfy the audit objective. This included an assessment of the five internal control components, including control environment, risk assessment, control activities, information and communication, and monitoring. In addition, we reviewed the principles of internal controls associated with the audit objective.

---

<sup>1</sup> We excluded Week 53 from our analysis of FY 2016 data.

<sup>2</sup> While we included NHCs in our analysis, SSA stated NHCs and hearing offices use differing business models. For example, ALJs in NHCs are supervisors and directly oversee decision writers. SSA, OIG, *The Role of National Hearing Centers in Reducing the Hearings Backlog*, A-12-11-11147, pp. 7 and 8 (April 2012). Given differences between NHCs and hearing offices, SSA indicated it is not always equitable to compare their metrics.

We identified the following components and principles as significant to the audit objective:

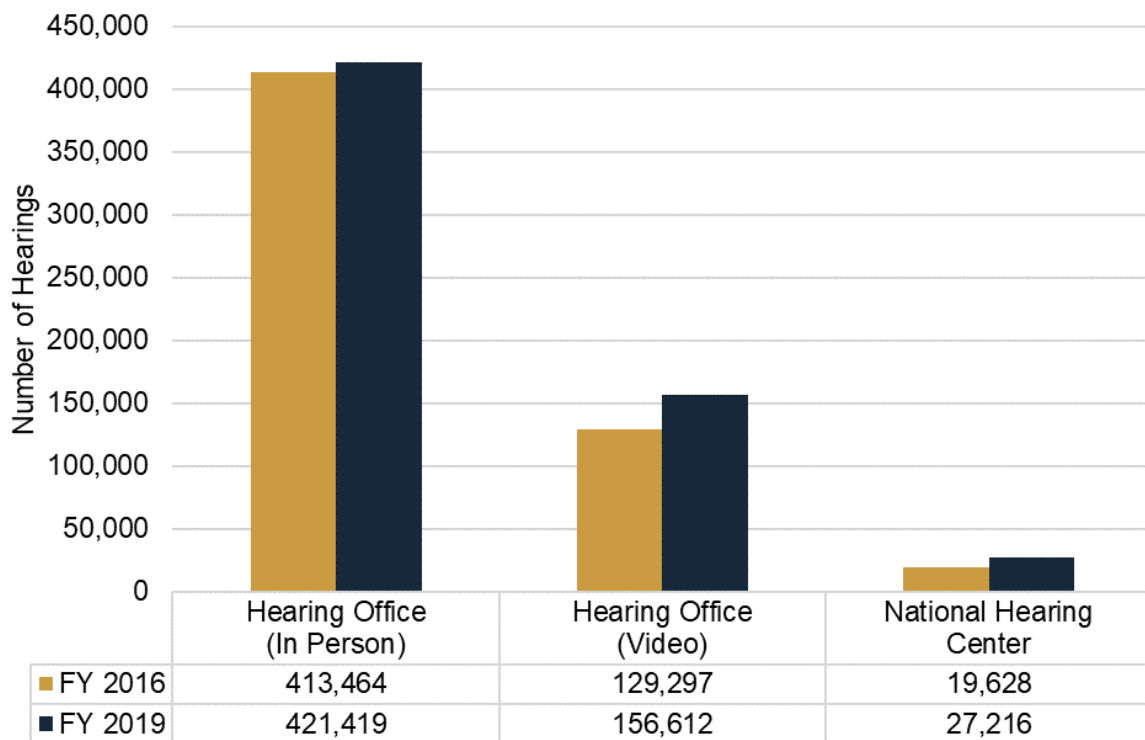
- Component 1 - Control Environment
  - Principle 2 - Exercise oversight responsibility
- Component 2 - Risk Assessment
  - Principle 7 - Identify, analyze, and respond to risk
- Component 3 - Control Activities
  - Principle 11 - Design activities for the information system
- Component 5 - Monitoring
  - Principle 16 – Perform monitoring activities

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

## Appendix B – HEARINGS DURING FISCAL YEARS 2016 AND 2019

The use of video-teleconference (VTC) hearings at the Office of Hearings Operations (OHO) increased by 23 percent from Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 to FY 2019 (see Figure B–1).<sup>1</sup> In FY 2019, OHO increased the use of VTC assistance and moved aged cases from backlogged offices to offices with more capacity. The Social Security Administration (SSA) also developed marketing tools to highlight the use of VTC hearings.

**Figure B–1: Number of In-person and VTC Hearings, FYs 2016 and 2019**

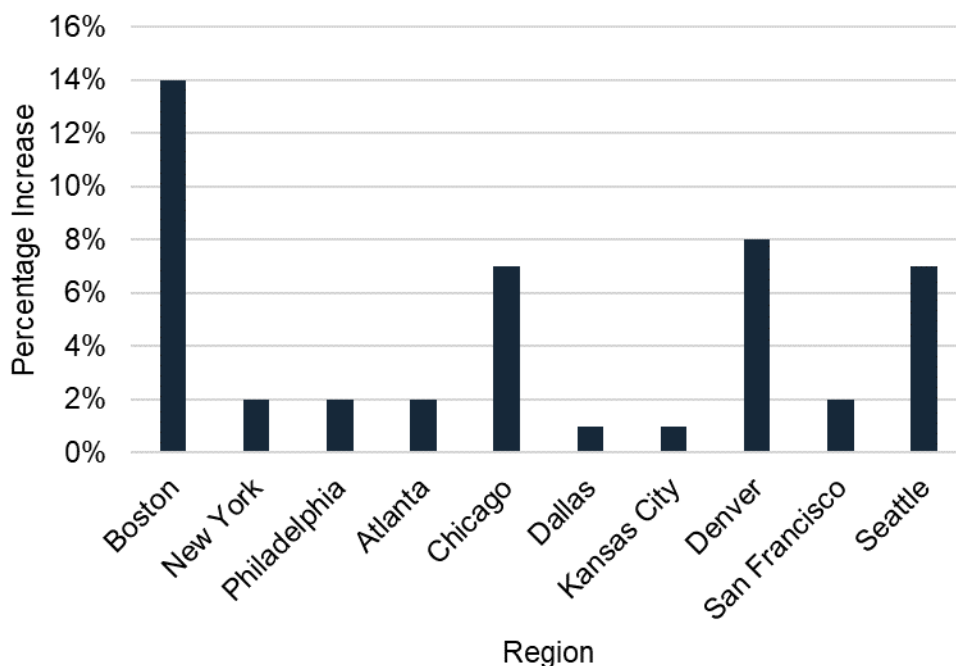


**Source:** SSA, CPMS Management Information.

<sup>1</sup> Given that the number of telephone hearings held in FYs 2016 and 2019 was low, OHO did not track them separately. Telephone hearings were counted with VTC hearings.

Regional VTC hearings rates increased between 1 and 14 percent from FY 2016 to 2019 (see Figure B–2 and Appendix D). While there are many factors that could influence VTC hearing rates, such as geographic differences, representation rates, and vocational issues, we did not consider these factors in our comparison.<sup>2</sup> The Boston Region had the largest increase in the VTC hearing rate with a 14-percent increase—from 22 percent of hearings by VTC in FY 2016 to 36 percent of hearings by VTC in FY 2019. SSA stated the Boston Region provided extensive VTC hearing assistance to other regions with higher numbers of hearing requests in FY 2019.

**Figure B–2: Percent Increase in VTC Hearing Rates Between FYs 2016 and 2019**



**Source:** OIG analysis of CPMS Management Information.

<sup>2</sup> We analyzed some factors, such as representation and impairment type, but did not find significant differences between in-person and VTC hearings. Therefore, we focused our review on overall trends in OHO hearings.

In both FYs 2016 and 2019, VTC hearing rates among hearing offices<sup>3</sup> ranged from less than 1 percent of hearings by VTC to over 70 percent (see Appendix E).<sup>4</sup> In a 2011 audit,<sup>5</sup> we found offices with low VTC hearing rates were generally heavily burdened offices that focused on in-person hearings. Other locations assisted these offices with hearings that could be conducted by VTC. According to SSA, this remained a contributing factor to variances in VTC hearing rates in FYs 2016 and 2019. In addition, SSA stated some offices may have held fewer VTC hearings if they were located in areas where it was easier for claimants to visit the office whereas VTC hearings could have been more optimal in remote areas. Despite the variances in VTC hearing rates, SSA found in an August 2017 study<sup>6</sup> that favorable rates were minimally higher for in-person hearings compared to video hearings—by 0.6 percent—and did not consider the difference significant.

Another factor that contributed to VTC hearing rates was claimants' and representatives' ability to opt out of VTC hearings. Federal regulations<sup>7</sup> require that SSA send a notice to the claimant and his/her representative informing them whether the claimant or any other party to the hearing will appear in person, via VTC, or by telephone and how to request a change in the time or place of the hearing. SSA informed us that, in FY 2019, claimant representatives declined 226,082 VTC hearings. As such, SSA stated it was more difficult to schedule hearings via VTC in geographic areas that had large numbers of representatives who opted out of VTC hearings. In 2019, SSA proposed a revision to a regulation<sup>8</sup> that would not allow parties to opt out or object to appear at a hearing by VTC. When SSA issued its final rule, it decided not to pursue this revision to the regulation after receiving comments on the near-universal preference to continue allowing parties to opt out of appearing by VTC.

---

<sup>3</sup> Each of OHO's 163 hearing offices held at least 1 hearing by VTC in FYs 2016 and 2019.

<sup>4</sup> We also analyzed VTC use by ALJs and found similar variances in VTC hearing rates.

<sup>5</sup> SSA, OIG, *Use of Video Hearings to Reduce the Hearing Case Backlog*, A-05-08-18070, p. 8 (April 2011).

<sup>6</sup> SSA, Office of Disability Adjudication [and] Review, *Differences in Allowance Rates Between Video Hearings and In-Person Hearings*, p. 1 (August 2017).

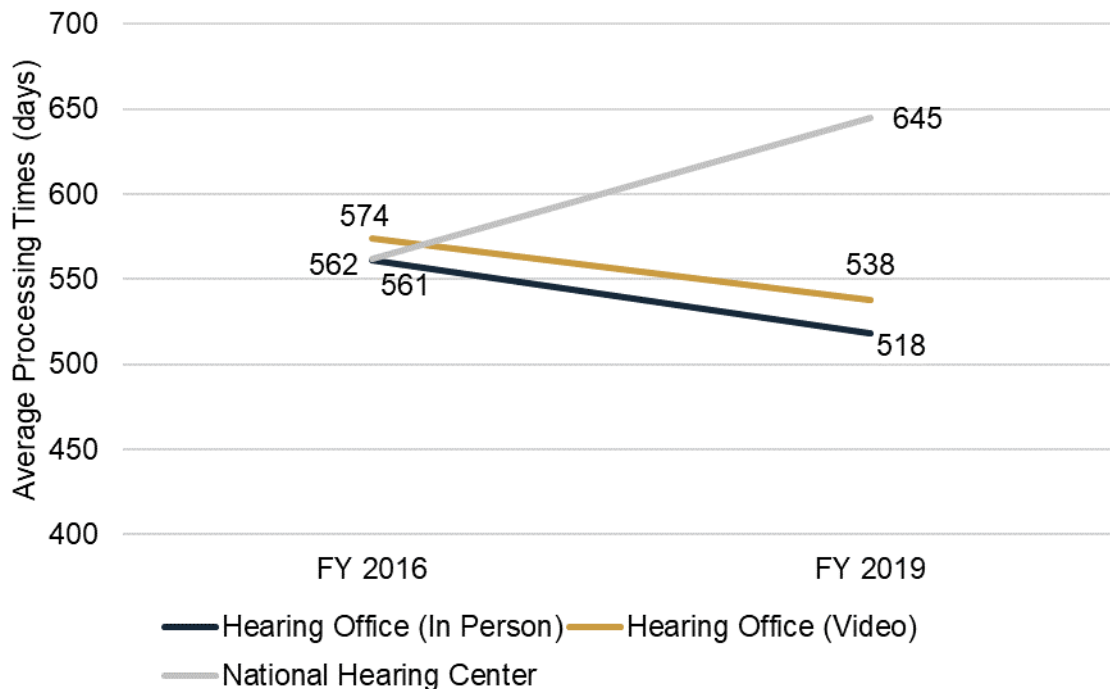
<sup>7</sup> 20 CFR 404.936(d) and 416.1436(d).

<sup>8</sup> *Setting the Manner for the Appearance of Parties and Witnesses at a Hearing*, 84 Fed. Reg. 69,298, pp. 69, 298 through 308 (December 18, 2019).

## Appendix C – AVERAGE PROCESSING TIMES DURING FISCAL YEARS 2016 AND 2019

The Office of Hearings Operations (OHO) overall average processing time, encompassing in-person and video-conference (VTC) hearings, on-the-record decisions, and dismissals, decreased from 543 days in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 to 506 days in FY 2019.<sup>1</sup> Processing times for VTC hearings were longer than in-person hearings in both FYs 2016 and 2019 (see Figure C–1). OHO reassigned aged cases to less-burdened hearing offices and National Hearing Centers where they were ultimately heard by VTC. These VTC hearings would have longer processing times on average because the cases were already aged when they were reassigned. In addition, according to OHO, scheduling VTC hearings is more difficult because of the need to coordinate two offices, sometimes across time zones.

**Figure C–1: Average Processing Time, FYs 2016 and 2019**



**Source:** OIG analysis of FYs 2016 and 2019 CPMS data.

**Note:** We calculated average processing time from the hearing request date to the disposition date. Such factors as geographic demographics, representation rates, and age of cases could influence processing times.

<sup>1</sup> One factor that contributed to the decrease in processing times was OHO's hiring of administrative law judges (ALJ), decision writers, and support staff. OHO hired approximately 600 ALJs since 2016. OHO also hired over 500 decision writers and 170 support staff in FY 2018. SSA, *Compassionate And REsponsive Service (CARES) Plan: 2018-2019 Update*, p. 1. OHO's hiring enabled an overall increase in ALJs and decision writers during this period.

## Appendix D – VIDEO-TELECONFERENCE HEARING RATES BY REGION

**Table D–1: Video-teleconference (VTC) Hearing Rates by Region, Fiscal Years (FY) 2016 and 2019**

Region	FY 2016				FY 2019				Increase in VTC Hearing Rate
	Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	
Boston	4,516	15,580	20,096	22%	7,262	12,761	20,023	36%	14%
New York	9,399	34,424	43,823	21%	11,794	38,859	50,653	23%	2%
Philadelphia	12,384	39,868	52,252	24%	15,127	42,483	57,610	26%	2%
Atlanta	37,445	110,300	147,745	25%	42,431	114,985	157,416	27%	2%
Chicago	18,323	68,804	87,127	21%	27,044	69,664	96,708	28%	7%
Dallas	23,439	46,960	70,399	33%	24,074	47,758	71,832	34%	1%
Kansas City	9,943	15,357	25,300	39%	11,485	17,303	28,788	40%	1%
Denver	3,112	11,967	15,079	21%	4,654	11,571	16,225	29%	8%
San Francisco	8,716	53,428	62,144	14%	9,361	50,275	59,636	16%	2%
Seattle	2,020	16,776	18,796	11%	3,380	15,760	19,140	18%	7%
<b>Nation</b>	<b>129,297</b>	<b>413,464</b>	<b>542,761</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>156,612</b>	<b>421,419</b>	<b>578,031</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>3%</b>
National Hearing Centers	19,628	-	19,628	100%	27,216	-	27,216	100%	0%

**Source:** OIG analysis of Office of Hearings Operations' Case Processing and Management System Management Information.

## Appendix E – VIDEO-TELECONFERENCE HEARING RATES BY HEARING OFFICE

**Table E-1: Video-teleconference (VTC) Hearing Rates by Hearing Office, Fiscal Years (FY) 2016 and 2019**

Region	Hearing Office	FY 2016				FY 2019				Change in VTC Hearing Rate
		Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	
Boston	Boston, MA	551	3,149	3,700	15%	1,190	2,942	4,132	29%	14%
	Hartford, CT	25	2,007	2,032	1%	524	2,158	2,682	20%	19%
	Lawrence, MA	1,359	1,428	2,787	49%	1,448	888	2,336	62%	13%
	Manchester, NH	906	1,379	2,285	40%	1,936	1,183	3,119	62%	22%
	New Haven, CT	34	2,076	2,110	2%	643	1,732	2,375	27%	25%
	Portland, ME	434	1,601	2,035	21%	575	858	1,433	40%	19%
	Providence, RI	758	2,352	3,110	24%	751	1,746	2,497	30%	6%
	Springfield, MA	449	1,588	2,037	22%	195	1,254	1,449	13%	-9%
New York	Albany, NY	1,151	2,789	3,940	29%	1,426	3,718	5,144	28%	-1%
	Bronx, NY	64	3,279	3,343	2%	16	3,367	3,383	0%	-2%
	Buffalo, NY	701	2,282	2,983	23%	737	2,071	2,808	26%	3%
	Jersey City, NJ	2,050	1,055	3,105	66%	2,873	1,147	4,020	71%	5%
	Long Island, NY	44	2,855	2,899	2%	23	2,749	2,772	1%	-1%
	New York, NY	25	3,727	3,752	1%	220	4,039	4,259	5%	4%
	New York Varick, NY	68	2,433	2,501	3%	40	1,792	1,832	2%	-1%
	Newark, NJ	44	3,663	3,707	1%	380	4,901	5,281	7%	6%
	Ponce, PR	676	528	1,204	56%	284	352	636	45%	-11%
	Queens, NY	57	2,363	2,420	2%	24	2,702	2,726	1%	-1%
	Rochester, NY	21	1,405	1,426	1%	7	1,599	1,606	0%	-1%
	San Juan, PR	944	2,330	3,274	29%	790	2,877	3,667	22%	-7%
	South Jersey, NJ	49	2,793	2,842	2%	396	3,737	4,133	10%	8%
	Syracuse, NY	1,492	1,717	3,209	46%	2,377	2,182	4,559	52%	6%
	White Plains, NY	2,013	1,205	3,218	63%	2,201	1,626	3,827	58%	-5%



Region	Hearing Office	FY 2016				FY 2019				Change in VTC Hearing Rate
		Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	
Philadelphia	Baltimore, MD	34	4,315	4,349	1%	372	4,349	4,721	8%	7%
	Charleston WV	1,727	822	2,549	68%	3,403	1,090	4,493	76%	8%
	Charlottesville, VA	1,637	1,312	2,949	56%	548	610	1,158	47%	-9%
	Dover, DE	446	935	1,381	32%	534	714	1,248	43%	11%
	Elkins Park, PA	1,022	4,246	5,268	19%	1,330	3,334	4,664	29%	10%
	Harrisburg, PA	278	3,414	3,692	8%	345	3,849	4,194	8%	0%
	Huntington, WV	658	668	1,326	50%	853	981	1,834	47%	-3%
	Johnstown, PA	411	1,395	1,806	23%	561	1,439	2,000	28%	5%
	Morgantown, WV	948	1,146	2,094	45%	756	1,483	2,239	34%	-11%
	Norfolk, VA	1,061	2,123	3,184	33%	1,013	1,884	2,897	35%	2%
	Philadelphia, PA	137	2,945	3,082	4%	340	3,696	4,036	8%	4%
	Philadelphia East, PA	36	3,110	3,146	1%	539	2,830	3,369	16%	15%
	Pittsburgh, PA	61	3,378	3,439	2%	79	4,029	4,108	2%	0%
	Richmond, VA	384	2,126	2,510	15%	1,314	2,271	3,585	37%	22%
	Roanoke, VA	1,356	948	2,304	59%	1,495	769	2,264	66%	7%
	Seven Fields, PA	1,439	1,210	2,649	54%	836	2,704	3,540	24%	-30%
	Washington, DC	90	2,501	2,591	3%	144	2,162	2,306	6%	3%
	Wilkes Barre, PA	659	3,274	3,933	17%	665	4,289	4,954	13%	-4%
Atlanta	Atlanta Downtown, GA	682	3,834	4,516	15%	387	4,865	5,252	7%	-8%
	Atlanta North, GA	859	3,649	4,508	19%	857	2,680	3,537	24%	5%
	Birmingham, AL	2,835	3,474	6,309	45%	2,468	3,909	6,377	39%	-6%
	Charleston, SC	1,225	3,119	4,344	28%	1,103	2,451	3,554	31%	3%
	Charlotte, NC	26	3,825	3,851	1%	21	5,369	5,390	0%	-1%
	Chattanooga, TN	1,297	3,623	4,920	26%	2,432	2,773	5,205	47%	21%
	Columbia, SC	480	2,458	2,938	16%	1,059	4,846	5,905	18%	2%
	Covington, GA	231	2,650	2,881	8%	137	2,999	3,136	4%	-4%
	Fayetteville, NC	77	2,149	2,226	3%	441	3,194	3,635	12%	9%

Region	Hearing Office	FY 2016				FY 2019				Change in VTC Hearing Rate
		Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	
	Florence, AL	143	2,643	2,786	5%	633	2,324	2,957	21%	16%
	Fort Myers, FL	288	1,364	1,652	17%	611	1,538	2,149	28%	11%
	Franklin, TN	2,386	2,405	4,791	50%	3,706	1,886	5,592	66%	16%
	Ft Lauderdale, FL	1,609	4,107	5,716	28%	1,379	4,270	5,649	24%	-4%
	Greensboro, NC	199	3,196	3,395	6%	81	3,042	3,123	3%	-3%
	Greenville, SC	665	3,892	4,557	15%	543	3,200	3,743	15%	0%
	Hattiesburg, MS	1,193	1,901	3,094	39%	1,895	2,823	4,718	40%	1%
	Jackson, MS	2,486	1,481	3,967	63%	1,435	1,498	2,933	49%	-14%
	Jacksonville, FL	1,713	3,851	5,564	31%	1,065	4,877	5,942	18%	-13%
	Kingsport, TN	554	3,056	3,610	15%	602	3,406	4,008	15%	0%
	Knoxville, TN	1,274	3,881	5,155	25%	2,192	2,899	5,091	43%	18%
	Lexington, KY	2,453	2,599	5,052	49%	1,946	2,227	4,173	47%	-2%
	Louisville, KY	276	2,438	2,714	10%	760	3,157	3,917	19%	9%
	Macon, GA	1,150	2,333	3,483	33%	806	2,623	3,429	24%	-9%
	Memphis, TN	259	3,305	3,564	7%	214	3,537	3,751	6%	-1%
	Miami, FL	245	3,082	3,327	7%	193	3,267	3,460	6%	-1%
	Middlesboro, KY	206	1,901	2,107	10%	798	1,111	1,909	42%	32%
	Mobile, AL	4,196	3,031	7,227	58%	3,256	2,972	6,228	52%	-6%
	Montgomery, AL	1,659	3,404	5,063	33%	1,634	2,654	4,288	38%	5%
	Nashville, TN	802	3,184	3,986	20%	1,713	2,034	3,747	46%	26%
	Orlando, FL	1,191	4,154	5,345	22%	992	5,346	6,338	16%	-6%
	Paducah, KY	777	485	1,262	62%	1,308	1,268	2,576	51%	-11%
	Raleigh, NC	962	4,230	5,192	19%	1,157	5,236	6,393	18%	-1%
	Savannah, GA	1,707	1,782	3,489	49%	1,425	1,636	3,061	47%	-2%
	St Petersburg, FL	31	4,952	4,983	1%	63	3,841	3,904	2%	1%
	Tallahassee, FL	573	1,993	2,566	22%	1,325	1,559	2,884	46%	24%
	Tampa, FL	74	5,809	5,883	1%	64	6,056	6,120	1%	0%

Region	Hearing Office	FY 2016				FY 2019				Change in VTC Hearing Rate
		Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	
	Tupelo, MS	662	1,060	1,722	38%	1,730	1,612	3,342	52%	14%
Chicago	Akron, OH	463	3,142	3,605	13%	976	3,197	4,173	23%	10%
	Chicago, IL	177	4,363	4,540	4%	626	3,889	4,515	14%	10%
	Cincinnati, OH	937	2,797	3,734	25%	659	2,594	3,253	20%	-5%
	Cleveland, OH	993	4,851	5,844	17%	2,006	4,131	6,137	33%	16%
	Columbus, OH	555	3,023	3,578	16%	519	2,650	3,169	16%	0%
	Dayton, OH	42	1,938	1,980	2%	581	1,510	2,091	28%	26%
	Detroit, MI	150	3,849	3,999	4%	1,848	3,510	5,358	34%	30%
	Evanston, IL	2,209	2,419	4,628	48%	1,963	1,874	3,837	51%	3%
	Evansville, IN	615	1,420	2,035	30%	1,017	1,817	2,834	36%	6%
	Flint, MI	346	1,521	1,867	19%	730	2,546	3,276	22%	3%
	Fort Wayne, IN	462	1,738	2,200	21%	859	1,217	2,076	41%	20%
	Grand Rapids, MI	129	1,836	1,965	7%	73	3,483	3,556	2%	-5%
	Indianapolis, IN	274	5,590	5,864	5%	521	5,049	5,570	9%	4%
	Lansing, MI	384	2,222	2,606	15%	545	3,020	3,565	15%	0%
	Livonia, MI	397	4,699	5,096	8%	539	3,343	3,882	14%	6%
	Madison, WI	727	1,047	1,774	41%	477	1,473	1,950	24%	-17%
	Milwaukee, WI	679	2,544	3,223	21%	1,839	3,189	5,028	37%	16%
	Minneapolis, MN	791	4,167	4,958	16%	309	3,996	4,305	7%	-9%
	Mt Pleasant, MI	593	1,804	2,397	25%	1,104	2,224	3,328	33%	8%
	Oak Brook, IL	2,091	1,856	3,947	53%	1,496	1,985	3,481	43%	-10%
	Oak Park, MI	413	4,457	4,870	8%	786	3,616	4,402	18%	10%
	Orland Park, IL	1,423	2,289	3,712	38%	3,129	1,922	5,051	62%	24%
	Peoria, IL	2,093	997	3,090	68%	1,951	1,160	3,111	63%	-5%
	Toledo, OH	534	2,668	3,202	17%	689	3,205	3,894	18%	1%
	Valparaiso, IN	846	1,567	2,413	35%	1,802	3,064	4,866	37%	2%

Region	Hearing Office	FY 2016				FY 2019				Change in VTC Hearing Rate
		Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	
Dallas	Albuquerque, NM	1,057	2,010	3,067	34%	1,342	2,662	4,004	34%	0%
	Alexandria, LA	2,156	1,759	3,915	55%	1,328	2,246	3,574	37%	-18%
	Dallas Downtown, TX	1,313	3,198	4,511	29%	1,296	2,421	3,717	35%	6%
	Dallas North, TX	2,431	4,814	7,245	34%	1,933	3,989	5,922	33%	-1%
	Fort Smith, AR	664	2,520	3,184	21%	956	1,661	2,617	37%	16%
	Fort Worth, TX	1,396	2,668	4,064	34%	1,557	2,839	4,396	35%	1%
	Houston North, TX	1,497	4,298	5,795	26%	1,970	4,064	6,034	33%	7%
	Houston-Bissonnet, TX	1,434	2,866	4,300	33%	541	5,148	5,689	10%	-23%
	Little Rock, AR	2,100	3,752	5,852	36%	1,693	3,864	5,557	30%	-6%
	McAlester, OK	1,551	440	1,991	78%	935	535	1,470	64%	-14%
	Metairie, LA	946	2,409	3,355	28%	740	2,478	3,218	23%	-5%
	New Orleans, LA	1,037	2,849	3,886	27%	1,083	2,423	3,506	31%	4%
	Oklahoma City, OK	1,754	3,634	5,388	33%	2,879	3,857	6,736	43%	10%
	Rio Grande Valley, TX	5	691	696	1%	647	1,331	1,978	33%	32%
	San Antonio, TX	1,608	5,309	6,917	23%	3,243	4,400	7,643	42%	19%
	Shreveport, LA	407	1,607	2,014	20%	590	1,173	1,763	33%	13%
	Tulsa, OK	2,083	2,136	4,219	49%	1,341	2,667	4,008	33%	-16%
Kansas City	Columbia, MO	938	1,194	2,132	44%	1,311	1,130	2,441	54%	10%
	Creve Coeur, MO	10	3,628	3,638	0%	23	3,973	3,996	1%	1%
	Kansas City, MO	2,545	3,286	5,831	44%	1,910	2,719	4,629	41%	-3%
	Omaha, NE	751	1,039	1,790	42%	1,440	1,454	2,894	50%	8%
	Springfield, MO	1,002	1,886	2,888	35%	956	1,952	2,908	33%	-2%
	St Louis, MO	517	2,028	2,545	20%	1,339	2,356	3,695	36%	16%
	Topeka, KS	1,787	722	2,509	71%	1,035	904	1,939	53%	-18%
	West Des Moines, IA	1,340	552	1,892	71%	1,444	1,667	3,111	46%	-25%
	Wichita, KS	1,053	1,022	2,075	51%	2,027	1,148	3,175	64%	13%

Region	Hearing Office	FY 2016				FY 2019				Change in VTC Hearing Rate
		Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	
Denver	Billings, MT	1,132	1,884	3,016	38%	1,451	1,213	2,664	54%	16%
	Colorado Springs, CO	616	2,505	3,121	20%	524	2,305	2,829	19%	-1%
	Denver, CO	162	4,330	4,492	4%	733	3,827	4,560	16%	12%
	Fargo, ND	1,117	946	2,063	54%	1,597	1,393	2,990	53%	-1%
	Salt Lake City, UT	85	2,302	2,387	4%	349	2,833	3,182	11%	7%
San Francisco	Fresno, CA	65	1,744	1,809	4%	92	2,346	2,438	4%	0%
	Honolulu, HI	397	716	1,113	36%	204	862	1,066	19%	-17%
	Las Vegas, NV	67	2,686	2,753	2%	140	2,549	2,689	5%	3%
	Long Beach, CA	267	1,689	1,956	14%	272	1,406	1,678	16%	2%
	Los Angeles Downtown, CA	8	3,077	3,085	0%	24	2,537	2,561	1%	1%
	Los Angeles West, CA	132	3,806	3,938	3%	258	2,304	2,562	10%	7%
	Moreno Valley, CA	168	2,425	2,593	6%	225	3,120	3,345	7%	1%
	Norwalk, CA	9	1,786	1,795	1%	4	2,363	2,367	0%	-1%
	Oakland, CA	128	2,796	2,924	4%	793	2,991	3,784	21%	17%
	Orange, CA	65	3,016	3,081	2%	54	3,029	3,083	2%	0%
	Pasadena, CA	570	2,916	3,486	16%	341	2,544	2,885	12%	-4%
	Phoenix Downtown, AZ	273	2,568	2,841	10%	532	2,379	2,911	18%	8%
	Phoenix North, AZ	578	2,346	2,924	20%	929	2,108	3,037	31%	11%
	Reno, NV	144	747	891	16%	380	512	892	43%	27%
	Sacramento, CA	1,242	4,873	6,115	20%	962	3,136	4,098	23%	3%
	San Bernardino, CA	285	2,541	2,826	10%	478	3,061	3,539	14%	4%
	San Diego, CA	426	3,783	4,209	10%	674	4,255	4,929	14%	4%
	San Francisco, CA	748	1,097	1,845	41%	867	840	1,707	51%	10%
	San Jose, CA	1,660	1,638	3,298	50%	319	1,064	1,383	23%	-27%
	San Rafael, CA	447	1,289	1,736	26%	604	1,325	1,929	31%	5%
	Santa Barbara, CA	345	1,189	1,534	22%	329	1,112	1,441	23%	1%
	Stockton, CA	107	2,709	2,816	4%	610	1,785	2,395	25%	21%

Region	Hearing Office	FY 2016				FY 2019				Change in VTC Hearing Rate
		Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	Number of VTC Hearings	Number of In-person Hearings	Total Hearings	VTC Hearing Rate	
	Tucson, AZ	585	1,991	2,576	23%	270	2,647	2,917	9%	-14%
Seattle	Anchorage, AK	145	406	551	26%	66	575	641	10%	-16%
	Eugene, OR	707	1,436	2,143	33%	1,123	2,143	3,266	34%	1%
	Portland, OR	120	4,885	5,005	2%	150	4,655	4,805	3%	1%
	Seattle, WA	626	3,630	4,256	15%	611	3,286	3,897	16%	1%
	Spokane, WA	314	3,100	3,414	9%	875	2,597	3,472	25%	16%
	Tacoma, WA	108	3,319	3,427	3%	555	2,504	3,059	18%	15%

**Source:** OIG analysis of Office of Hearings Operations' Case Processing and Management System Management Information.

**Note:** All hearing offices had at least 1 VTC hearing. Due to rounding, some hearing offices show 0 percent VTC hearings.

## Appendix F— AGENCY COMMENTS

---




### SOCIAL SECURITY

#### MEMORANDUM

Date: July 1, 2022 Refer To: TQA-1

To: Gail S. Ennis  
Inspector General

From: Scott Frey   
Chief of Staff

Subject: Office of the Inspector General Draft Report, "The Office of Hearings Operations' Use of Video and Telephone Hearings" (A-05-18-50615) — INFORMATION

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report. We agree with the recommendation.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance. You may direct staff inquiries to Trae Sommer at (410) 965-9102.



- Mission:** The Social Security Office of the Inspector General (OIG) serves the public through independent oversight of SSA's programs and operations.
- Report:** Social Security-related scams and Social Security fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement, at [oig.ssa.gov/report](https://oig.ssa.gov/report).
- Connect:** [OIG.SSA.GOV](https://OIG.SSA.GOV)

Visit our website to read about our audits, investigations, fraud alerts, news releases, whistleblower protection information, and more.

Follow us on social media via these external links:



Twitter: @TheSSAOIG



Facebook: OIGSSA



YouTube: TheSSAOIG



Subscribe to email updates on our website.