



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit Report

2017-FMIC-C-006

The CFPB's Civil Penalty Fund Is in
Compliance With the Improper Payments
Information Act of 2002, as Amended

March 29, 2017

BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM
CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU

Report Contributors

Kimberly Perteet, Project Lead

La'Toya Holt, Auditor

Naomi Parham, Intern

Silvia Vizcarra, OIG Manager

Cynthia Gray, Senior OIG Manager for Financial Management and Internal Controls

Melissa Heist, Associate Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations

Abbreviations

CFPB	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Civil Penalty Fund	Consumer Financial Civil Penalty Fund
Dodd-Frank Act	Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act
FY	fiscal year
IPIA	Improper Payments Information Act of 2002, as amended
OIG	Office of Inspector General



Executive Summary:

The CFPB's Civil Penalty Fund Is in Compliance With the Improper Payments Information Act of 2002, as Amended

2017-FMIC-C-006

March 29, 2017

Purpose

The Improper Payments Information Act of 2002, as amended (IPIA), requires agency heads to periodically review and identify all programs and activities that may be susceptible to significant improper payments. Our objective was to determine whether the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) is in compliance with the act.

Background

The CFPB determined that the Consumer Financial Civil Penalty Fund (Civil Penalty Fund) is subject to IPIA. According to IPIA statutory guidance, if an agency fails to meet any one of six requirements, that agency is not compliant with IPIA.

The Civil Penalty Fund contains money that the CFPB collects from judicial and administrative actions against people or companies that violate federal consumer financial law. Funds may be used to pay victims or for consumer education, financial literacy programs, and program administration costs. For fiscal year 2016, total disbursements from the Civil Penalty Fund were approximately \$54 million.

Results of Audit

We determined that the CFPB complied with the applicable requirements of IPIA for fiscal year 2016 as they relate to the Civil Penalty Fund.

First, IPIA requires agencies to publish an annual financial statement for the most recent fiscal year and post that report on the agency's website. The CFPB complied with this requirement by publishing its *Financial Report of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Fiscal Year 2016*, dated November 15, 2016.

Second, IPIA requires agencies to complete a program-specific risk assessment at least once every 3 fiscal years to evaluate whether their programs may be susceptible to improper payments. The CFPB complied with this requirement by conducting a risk assessment of the Civil Penalty Fund in fiscal year 2014. As a result of conducting this risk assessment, the CFPB concluded that the risk of improper payments from the Civil Penalty Fund was *low*. Although not required, the agency updated its 2014 risk assessment in fiscal year 2015 and determined that the risk for improper payments remained *low*. The CFPB was not required to complete a risk assessment in fiscal year 2016.

We determined that the remaining four IPIA requirements were not applicable.

Summary of Recommendations, OIG Report 2017-FMIC-C-006

Recommendation number	Page	Recommendation	Responsible office
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No recommendations



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM
CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU

March 29, 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Elizabeth Reilly
Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Director, Office of the Chief Financial Officer
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

FROM: Melissa Heist *Melissa Heist*
Associate Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations

SUBJECT: OIG Report 2017-FMIC-C-006: *The CFPB's Civil Penalty Fund Is in Compliance With the Improper Payments Information Act of 2002, as Amended*

The Office of Inspector General has completed its report on the subject audit. We conducted this audit to determine whether the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) is in compliance with the Improper Payments Information Act of 2002, which has been amended by the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act of 2010 and the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Improvement Act of 2012 (IPIA). We determined that the CFPB fully complied with the applicable requirements for fiscal year 2016 as they relate to the Consumer Financial Civil Penalty Fund.

We provided CFPB management with a draft of this report for review and comment. At an exit conference held on March 23, 2017, CFPB management stated that they concur with the content of the report. Because we are not making formal recommendations, a written response to this report was not required.

We appreciate the cooperation that we received from staff members in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer during our audit. The report will be distributed to the following individuals and organizations as required by IPIA and Office of Management and Budget guidance:

- the Director of the CFPB
- the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate
- the Committee on Oversight and Governmental Reform, U.S. House of Representatives
- the Comptroller General
- the Controller of the Office of Management and Budget

Please contact me if you would like to discuss this report or any related issues.

cc: Sartaj Alag, Chief Operating Officer and Associate Director
Tonya Dunham, Director, Compliance and Internal Controls
Rumana Ahmad, Director, Governance and Compliance

Contents

Introduction	1
Objective.....	1
Background.....	1
<i>IPIA's Applicability to the CFPB</i>	2
The CFPB Complied With Applicable Requirements of IPIA	3
Appendix A: Scope and Methodology	5

Introduction

Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) is in compliance with the Improper Payments Information Act of 2002, which has been amended by the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act of 2010 and the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Improvement Act of 2012 (IPIA).¹

Background

IPIA requires agency heads to periodically review all programs and activities that the agency head administers and identify all programs and activities that may be susceptible to significant improper payments. Significant improper payments are defined as improper payments in the program or activity in the preceding fiscal year that may have exceeded (1) both \$10 million of all program or activity payments made during that fiscal year and 1.5 percent of program outlays or (2) \$100 million. Further, *payment* is defined as any transfer or commitment for future transfer of federal funds, such as cash, securities, loans, loan guarantees, and insurance subsidies, to any nonfederal person or entity or a federal employee that is made by a federal agency, a federal contractor, a federal grantee, or a governmental or other organization administering a federal program or activity.

In addition, IPIA requires that each fiscal year, the Inspector General of each agency determine and report on whether the agency is in compliance with the act. *Compliance* is defined by the act to mean that the agency has done the following:

1. Published an annual financial statement for the most recent fiscal year and posted that report and any accompanying materials on the agency website.
2. Conducted a program-specific risk assessment for each program or activity that conforms with section 2(a) of IPIA (if required).
3. Published improper payment estimates for all programs and activities identified as susceptible to significant improper payments under section 2(c) of IPIA in the accompanying materials to the annual financial statement (if required).

1. Although the OIG's compliance assessment and reporting process is a requirement of the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act of 2010, the agency requirements appear in the Improper Payments Information Act of 2002, as amended by the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act of 2010 and the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Improvement Act of 2012. For simplicity, the use of *IPIA* throughout this report refers to the collective requirements of the Improper Payments Information Act of 2002, the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act of 2010, and the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Improvement Act of 2012.

4. Published programmatic corrective action plans under section 2(d) of IPIA that the agency may have in the accompanying materials to the annual financial statement (if required).
5. Published (and is meeting) improper payments reduction targets under section 2(d) of IPIA that the agency may have in the accompanying materials to the annual financial statement for each program assessed to be at risk (if required).
6. Reported an improper payment rate of less than 10 percent for each program and activity for which an improper payment estimate was obtained and published under section 2(c) of IPIA.

Based on these statutory criteria, if an agency does not meet one or more of these requirements, it is not compliant with IPIA.

IPIA's Applicability to the CFPB

The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (Dodd-Frank Act) established two funds related to the programs and operations of the CFPB: the Bureau Fund and the Consumer Financial Civil Penalty Fund (Civil Penalty Fund). The CFPB's operations are funded principally by transfers made by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System from the combined earnings of the Federal Reserve System, up to the limits set forth in the Dodd-Frank Act. The funds that are transferred from the Federal Reserve System are deposited into the Bureau Fund. The Dodd-Frank Act provides that funds obtained by or transferred to the Bureau Fund are not to be construed as government funds or appropriated monies; therefore, the CFPB has determined that the Bureau Fund is not subject to IPIA.

The CFPB also maintains a separate fund, the Civil Penalty Fund, into which the CFPB deposits the civil penalties it collects in judicial and administrative actions for violations of federal consumer financial law. Funds in the Civil Penalty Fund may be used for payments to the victims of activities for which the civil penalties have been imposed. To the extent that such victims cannot be located or such payments are otherwise not practicable, the CFPB may use funds in the Civil Penalty Fund for the purpose of consumer education and financial literacy programs. According to the Civil Penalty Fund rule, funds in the Civil Penalty Fund may also be used for administrative costs associated with making payments to Civil Penalty Fund victims. Because the Dodd-Frank Act is silent on whether funds in the Civil Penalty Fund should be construed as government funds or appropriated monies, the CFPB has determined that the Civil Penalty Fund is subject to IPIA. Therefore, the CFPB is required to conduct a periodic risk assessment of the fund at least once every 3 fiscal years. For fiscal year (FY) 2016, total disbursements from the Civil Penalty Fund were approximately \$54 million.

The CFPB Complied With Applicable Requirements of IPIA

We determined that the CFPB complied with the applicable requirements of IPIA for FY 2016 as they relate to the Civil Penalty Fund. Specifically, we found that the CFPB met the first two IPIA requirements by (1) publishing an annual financial statement for the most recent fiscal year and posting that report on the agency website and (2) conducting a program-specific risk assessment in conformance with section 2(a) of IPIA. The other four IPIA requirements are not applicable to the Civil Penalty Fund, as the CFPB has determined that the fund is not susceptible to significant improper payments. The results of our review, by requirement, are detailed below.

1. Did the CFPB publish an annual financial statement for the most recent fiscal year and post that report and any accompanying materials required by the Office of Management and Budget on the agency website?

The CFPB complied with this requirement by publishing on the agency's website its *Financial Report of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Fiscal Year 2016* and accompanying materials required by the Office of Management and Budget, dated November 15, 2016, as required by the act.

2. Did the CFPB conduct a specific risk assessment for each program or activity that conformed with section 2(a) of the IPIA (if required)?

The CFPB complied with this requirement by conducting a program-specific risk assessment for the Civil Penalty Fund. IPIA's periodic review requirement mandates that agencies complete a program-specific risk assessment at least once every 3 fiscal years to evaluate whether the programs may be susceptible to improper payments. The CFPB conducted a risk assessment of the Civil Penalty Fund in FY 2014 and determined that the risk of improper payments from the Civil Penalty Fund was *low*. Although not required, the CFPB updated the FY 2014 risk assessment in 2015 and found that the risk of improper payments was *low* and that the Civil Penalty Fund is not susceptible to significant improper payments.² The CFPB was not required to conduct a risk assessment in FY 2016.

3. Did the CFPB publish improper payment estimates for all programs and activities identified as susceptible to significant improper payments under section 2(c) of the IPIA in the accompanying materials to the annual financial statement (if required)?

This requirement is not applicable. The CFPB determined that the Civil Penalty Fund is not susceptible to significant improper payments.

2. The CFPB updated the FY 2014 risk assessment in 2015 to consider payments for consumer education and financial literacy programs and vendor administrative costs.

- 4. Did the CFPB publish programmatic corrective action plans under section 2(d) of the IPIA that the agency may have in the accompanying materials to the annual financial statement (if required)?**

This requirement is not applicable. The CFPB determined that the Civil Penalty Fund is not susceptible to significant improper payments.

- 5. Has the CFPB published (and is it meeting) improper payments reduction targets under section 2(d) of the IPIA that the agency may have, in the accompanying materials to the annual financial statement for each program, assessed to be at risk (if required)?**

This requirement is not applicable. The CFPB determined that the Civil Penalty Fund is not susceptible to significant improper payments.

- 6. Did the CFPB report an improper payment rate of less than 10 percent for each program and activity for which an improper payment estimate was obtained and published under section 2(c) of the IPIA?**

This requirement is not applicable. The CFPB determined that the Civil Penalty Fund is not susceptible to significant improper payments.

Appendix A

Scope and Methodology

To accomplish our objective, we reviewed the CFPB's *Financial Report of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Fiscal Year 2016* and accompanying materials. In addition, we reviewed the CFPB's risk assessment of the Civil Penalty Fund and other pertinent documentation. We also interviewed CFPB officials in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer responsible for the oversight of the Civil Penalty Fund and the IPIA reporting process.

We conducted our fieldwork in February 2017. 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 our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.



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