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SOCIAL SECURITY

Little Overall Change in Telephone Accessibility Between 1985 and 1988

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The Honorable Lawton Chiles
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable William H. Natcher
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

This report is one of a series we are providing in response to your request that we continue to monitor Social Security Administration (SSA) service to the public in light of continuing staff reductions. Specifically, the report discusses the ease or difficulty that the public has in reaching SSA by telephone. It is based on test calls we made to SSA facilities in May 1988 and compares the results to a similar test we made in 1985.

On October 1, 1988, SSA plans to implement nationwide 800 telephone service, which entails a significant restructuring of its existing phone service delivery system. The test results discussed here can serve as a baseline for comparing the quality of SSA's phone service under the new 800 system.

SSA does not have service standards that apply to all calls or all of its phone answering facilities; standards exist only for SSA's 34 teleservice centers (TSCs). Consequently, to facilitate analysis and discussion of our test results, our test calls were categorized into two groups—one to describe and quantify "easy" access and the other, "difficult" access. Both are expressed as a percentage of calls made. Easy access represents calls answered directly or placed on hold for less than 2 minutes. Difficult access refers to calls that were either busy, disconnected, terminated after 10 rings or about 1 minute because no one answered, or placed on hold for more than 2 minutes.

Results in Brief

During our May 1988 test, we had easy access for 71 percent of our calls. This compares to 73 percent of calls experiencing easy access during our May 1985 test. Overall, 15.2 percent of our initial test calls got

busy signals, as did 6 of every 10 repeat calls. Also, as in the 1985 test, accessibility during the 1988 test varied widely among SSA phone facilities, between SSA regions, and according to when the call was made. For example, the easy access rate for the Houston TSC was 98 percent, while the rate for the Lodi, New Jersey, TSC was 7 percent.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our primary objective was to measure the extent to which SSA is accessible by telephone and compare it to SSA's accessibility 3 years earlier. Also, to gain insight into possible factors contributing to changes in TSC accessibility, we obtained the views of selected TSC managers.

To measure accessibility, in May 1988 we made 3,674 test telephone calls to randomly selected SSA facilities at randomly selected times. Nationwide, 34 TSCs—SSA's primary telephone service facilities—serve major metropolitan areas or entire states and provide service to about 50 percent of the nation's population. SSA has 30 other central answering units that are dedicated to answering telephone inquiries from the public—10 statewide answering units and 20 mini-TSCs, which cover areas as large as an entire state or as small as a district. They provide service to about 12 percent of the nation's population. The other 38 percent of the population receives telephone service directly from about 630 local SSA offices that are not supported by any of the centralized answering facilities.

The sampling methodology we used was similar to the one we used in a May 1985 telephone test of accessibility to SSA and enables a statistical comparison to be made between the 1985 and 1988 test results. The methodology and results of our May 1985 test were described in our report Social Security: Improved Telephone Accessibility Would Better Serve the Public (GAO/HRD-86-85, Aug. 29, 1986). See appendix I for additional details on our sampling and estimation methodology.

To identify possible factors causing significant changes in accessibility to TSCs, we spoke with the managers of 10 TSCs. Those contacted had the largest percentage of improvement or decline in accessibility between the May 1985 and May 1988 tests.

Our review work was done from February to August 1988 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Overall Accessibility—Little Change but Continued Variability by Facility Type

Easy accessibility to SSA by phone decreased from 73 percent (May 1985) to 71 percent (May 1988), which is not a statistically significant difference. However, easy accessibility varied by facility type, as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Overall Easy-Access Rates for May 1985 and May 1988

Figures represent percent of calls placed

Facility type	Easy-access rate		Calls straight through		Calls on hold less than 2 minutes	
	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88
TSCs	73.1	66.5	50.6	45.0	22.5	21.5
Statewide units	58.5	58.2	31.7	35.1	26.8	23.1
Mini-TSCs	60.7	44.0	37.1	16.4	23.7	27.6
Local offices	76.1	82.6	64.0	76.5	12.1	6.1
Overall results	**72.6**	**70.9**	**54.0**	**54.9**	**18.6**	**16.0**

Test calls experiencing difficult access—that is, they either were busy, were placed on hold longer than 2 minutes, went unanswered, or were disconnected—rose slightly from 27 percent (May 1985) to 29 percent (May 1988). Overall, 15.2 percent of our test calls got a busy signal. This rate slightly exceeds the 15-percent busy signal standard that SSA applies to TSCs. When we made repeat calls within 15 minutes to numbers that got busy signals, we received a busy signal for 6 of every 10 calls made. Mini-TSCs had a 30-percent rate of busy signals for initial calls, which was more than double the rate of busy signals received during the May 1985 test. They also continued to have the highest rate of calls on hold for 2 minutes or longer. Table 2 shows, by facility type, the difficult-access rate for our May 1988 test.

Table 2: Overall Difficult-Access Rates for May 1985 and May 1988

Figures represent percent of calls placed

Facility type	Difficult-access rate		Busy rate		Disconnected or terminated calls		Calls on hold 2 minutes or longer	
	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88
TSCs	26.9	33.5	8.9	13.5	4.2	4.6	13.8	15.4
Statewide units	41.5	41.8	20.4	20.5	8.0	5.8	13.1	15.4
Mini-TSCs	39.3	56.0	13.2	30.0	5.8	4.0	20.3	22.0
Local offices	23.9	17.4	19.3	14.3	1.2	2.1	3.3	1.1
Overall results	**27.4**	**29.1**	**14.3**	**15.2**	**3.3**	**3.7**	**9.8**	**10.2**

In a separate analysis for our 1988 test, we also calculated the average wait time for all calls on hold. We found that total calls on hold for all facilities averaged about 125 seconds, which exceeds the 119-second standard that SSA applies to calls answered by TSCs.

TSC Performance Declined and Continues to Vary

Comparing the May 1988 and May 1985 test results showed a statistically significant difference in the performance of TSCs—a decline in access of almost 7 percentage points. Appendix II contains a detailed comparison of easy and difficult access for each TSC. Overall, 13 TSCs had improved accessibility, 16 had reduced accessibility, and 5 stayed about the same (i.e., less than 5-percent rate of change). West Coast TSCs—such as Portland, Seattle, Los Angeles, and San Diego—were significantly less accessible in 1988 than in 1985. See table 3 for a breakdown of TSCs that improved, declined, or stayed the same.

Table 3: Performance of TSCs for May 1985 and May 1988

Figures represent percent of calls placed

TSC	Easy-access rate May 85	Easy-access rate May 88	Percent of change
Improved accessibility (13):			
Jersey City, NJ	25.8	51.1	+98
Cincinnati, OH	41.7	77.8	+87
Parlin, NJ	32.7	51.2	+57
Buffalo, NY	63.8	82.2	+29
Cleveland, OH	66.7	84.4	+27
Berkeley, CA	78.7	95.6	+21
Milwaukee, WI	81.0	92.5	+14
Chicago (S), IL	68.9	76.2	+11
Chicago (N), IL	83.3	91.1	+ 9
Houston, TX	90.0	97.7	+ 9
Detroit, MI	81.7	88.2	+ 8
New Orleans, LA	88.2	93.5	+ 6
Indianapolis, IN	86.6	90.7	+ 5
Reduced accessibility (16):			
Lodi, NJ	49.2	6.7	−86
Seattle, WA	81.6	11.6	−86
Portland, OR	84.7	33.3	−61
Los Angeles, CA	81.4	35.3	−57
San Diego, CA	68.9	35.6	−48
Atlanta, GA	93.4	48.9	−48
Jamaica, NY	67.3	42.0	−38
Westminster, MD	81.3	64.4	−21
Ft. Lauderdale, FL	65.0	53.3	−18
Phoenix, AZ	91.5	78.6	−14
Des Moines, IA	89.8	77.3	−14
Upper Darby, PA	91.7	79.4	−13
St. Louis, MO	93.3	81.8	−12
Tampa, FL	85.2	76.1	−11
Manassas, VA	76.3	72.7	−5
Twin Cities, MN	87.7	83.7	−5
Stable accessibility (5):			
Pittsburgh, PA	90.2	93.2	+ 3
Grand Prairie, TX	96.7	95.5	−1
Boston, MA	77.6	75.6	−3
Kansas City, MO	89.7	86.7	−3
Golden, CO	71.8	68.9	−4

We interviewed 10 TSC managers whose centers' accessibility had changed significantly since the 1988 test and asked them to explain why their accessibility improved or declined.

The three managers whose TSCs had the most improved access (Jersey City, Cincinnati, and Parlin) told us that a better computer terminal to staff ratio was the primary reason why their performance improved. The managers indicated that before this change, staff had to share a limited number of terminals and spent more time waiting to use a terminal than answering phone calls.

In addition, the Cincinnati TSC manager cited staggered lunch breaks as a reason for improved accessibility, while the Parlin TSC manager instituted the practice of "receptioning" calls (requesting the caller's name and phone number and agreeing to return the call at a less busy time) as a method to improve accessibility.

The seven TSC managers with the greatest percentage of decline in easy access (Jamaica, Atlanta, San Diego, Los Angeles, Portland, Seattle, and Lodi) generally attributed the problem to not having enough teleservice representatives for the number of incoming lines. For example, the Jamaica TSC has 90 incoming lines and, as of May 1988, had 49 full-time teleservice representatives. The first 49 incoming calls are answered directly, and the next 41 calls are placed on hold. Once all lines are full, other callers get a busy signal. The manager said that the poor ratio, coupled with an increase in call volume, resulted in the low accessibility reflected in our May 1988 test. Less frequently cited reasons for the decline in easy access were the need to train new staff; high staff turnover; increased call volume, especially concerning social security card applications; and poorly performing telephone lines.

Appendix II shows that the number of test calls to TSCs experiencing difficult access increased from 27 percent in May 1985 to 34 percent in May 1988. Eleven of the 34 TSCs did not meet the 15-percent busy signal standard, up from 4 centers in our 1985 test.

We also compared our test results with the new service standards SSA has established for its planned nationwide 800 service. Under the new system 5 percent or less of all calls are expected to receive busy signals, and average wait time for calls on hold is expected to be 60 seconds or less. For our May 1988 test, 13 of 34 TSCs experienced busy signal rates of 5 percent or less, and 7 of 34 TSCs had average wait times of 60 seconds or less for calls placed on hold.

Table 4: TSC Average Wait Time for Calls on Hold

TSC	Average seconds on hold	TSC	Average seconds on hold
Lodi, NJ	281	Kansas City, MO	87
Seattle, WA	208	San Diego, CA	84
Los Angeles, CA	192	Cincinnati, OH	84
Portland, OR	188	Cleveland, OH	83
Jamaica, NY	187	Pittsburgh, PA	81
Phoenix, AZ	166	St. Louis, MO	80
Parlin, NJ	160	Manassas, VA	79
Ft. Lauderdale, FL	146	Chicago (N), IL	72
Jersey City, NJ	134	Indianapolis, IN	70
Golden, CO	131	Detroit, MI	65
Tampa, FL	121	Chicago (S), IL	59
Westminster, MD	120	Milwaukee, WI	47
Upper Darby, PA	115	Berkeley, CA	43
Twin Cities, MN	111	Houston, TX	39
Atlanta, GA	101	Grand Prairie, TX	36
Boston, MA	100	New Orleans, LA	34
Des Moines, IA	91	Buffalo, NY	27

Overall Access to Statewide Units Has Not Changed

Overall access to statewide units has not changed from May 1985 to May 1988. About 58 percent of our calls got straight through or were answered within 2 minutes after being placed on hold in both 1985 and 1988. Appendix III contains a detailed comparison of easy and difficult access for each statewide unit.

Our May 1988 test indicated that several statewide units continue to have problems. For example, calls in 6 of the 12 states had busy signal rates above the TSC standard of 15 percent; this included 4 (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and South Dakota) that exceeded the standard during our May 1985 test. Other units having problems included Idaho, which experienced a 62.8-percent rate of calls on hold longer than 2 minutes, and Utah, which experienced a 23.8-percent rate of calls disconnected or terminated.

When the Call Is Placed Affects Access

As in our May 1985 test, the May 1988 test results show that a caller's chances of reaching SSA by phone are affected by time of day, week, and month when the call is placed.

Test calls placed later in the week or month had a better chance of reaching an SSA representative. Similarly, calls placed between noon and 1 p.m. generally had the highest access rate. Table 5 compares easy-access rates by hour, day, and week.

Table 5: Comparison of Easy Access by Week, Day, and Hour for May 1985 and May 1988

Figures represent percent of calls placed

	Easy-access rate	
	May 85	May 88
Week of month:		
First	64.5	58.4
Second	76.0	69.2
Third	76.3	72.4
Fourth	74.1	79.5
Day of week:		
Monday	59.7	64.4
Tuesday	69.8	69.6
Wednesday	76.2	69.3
Thursday	76.8	74.0
Friday	76.8	73.6
Hour of day:		
9-10	69.9	67.1
10-11	63.1	61.6
11-12	74.0	70.6
12-1	77.9	76.7
1-2	72.7	72.7
2-3	74.3	66.4
3-4	72.7	68.7
4-4:30	73.7	78.1

Analyzing the May 1988 test results by time zone showed that the 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. hour had the highest busy signal rate for the Eastern, Rocky Mountain, and Pacific time zones, while the 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. hour had the highest busy signal rate for the Central time zone.

Test Results by SSA Region

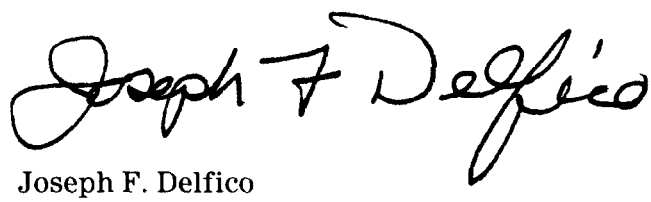
Analyzing our test results by SSA region shows that most generally retained the relative ranking they had in the May 1985 test. The Chicago and Boston regions showed the most improvement in accessibility and ranking, and the Seattle region, the largest decrease. Table 6 compares overall accessibility for facilities in each SSA region. (App. IV provides additional detail by type of facility.)

Table 6: Easy Accessibility and Relative Ranking by Region

Figures represent percent of calls placed

Region	May 85		May 88	
	Rate	Rank	Rate	Rank
Seattle	83.3	1	42.9	10
Philadelphia	80.8	2	78.5	4
Dallas	80.0	3	87.3	1
Kansas City	78.0	4	84.0	2
Denver	76.4	5	75.7	5
Atlanta	75.8	6	71.8	7
San Francisco	75.8	7	70.2	8
Chicago	70.0	8	83.3	3
Boston	57.5	9	72.4	6
New York	49.5	10	58.9	9

As you requested, we did not obtain written comments from SSA on a draft of this report because to do so would have delayed its issuance; however, we discussed its contents with SSA officials and incorporated their comments where appropriate. As arranged with your offices, we plan no further distribution of this report until 5 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to other congressional committees and members; the Secretary of Health and Human Services; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; the SSA Commissioner; and other interested parties. We will also make copies available to others upon request.



Joseph F. Delfico
Senior Associate Director

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Abbreviations

GAO	General Accounting Office
SSA	Social Security Administration
TSC	teleservice center

Sampling and Estimation Methodology

The purpose of our test was to determine the quality of the public's access to the Social Security Administration (SSA) by telephone. Our results are based on a nationwide telephone survey, conducted May 2-27, 1988, of SSA's telephone facilities. It included (1) teleservice centers (TSCs), (2) statewide units, (3) mini-TSCs, and (4) local (district and branch) offices. The universe of facilities, the proportion of the national population served, and numbers of calls made are presented in table I.1.

Table I.1: GAO Survey: Sample Size by Facility Type

Facility type	No.	Percent of U.S population served	No. of calls made	Percent of sample
TSCs	34	50.0	1,644	44.7
Statewide units	10	5.5	480	13.1
Mini-TSCs	20	6.5	503	13.7
Local offices	630	38.0	1,047	28.5
Total	**694**	**100.0**	**3,674**	**100.0**

Sample Sizes Statistically Reliable

We computed sample sizes to provide statistically reliable estimates for each of the 34 TSCs and the 10 statewide units. Conversely, sample sizes for mini-TSCs and local offices were sufficient for statistically reliable estimates for each of these two groups as a whole, but not for individual facilities. To obtain statistically reliable estimates for individual mini-TSCs and local offices, we would have to make about four times as many test telephone calls, which would have required considerably more time and resources. We selected sample sizes to assure a sampling error of no more than plus or minus 5 percent at the 95-percent level of statistical confidence for each type of facility.

Sample Design and Estimates

We first identified all telephone numbers by which the public could call each of SSA's 694 facilities. We then developed a matrix dividing each workday into 15-minute intervals. The intervals spanned 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. local time at the facility to be called; this is the official work schedule followed by virtually all SSA regional and field offices. We then randomly assigned sample calls to the telephone numbers available and to a time interval. The call was made at any time within the interval that a caller became available. We made calls to each of the 34 TSCs, 10 statewide units, 20 mini-TSCs, and 496 of the 630 local offices that were randomly selected based on our sampling plan. We computed the estimates presented in this report by applying appropriate weighting factors to reflect the varying sampling ratios for each facility.

To facilitate analysis and discussion of our test results, our test calls were categorized into two groups—one to describe and quantify "easy" access and the other, "difficult" access. Both are expressed as a percentage of calls made. Easy access represents calls answered directly or placed on hold for less than 2 minutes. Difficult access refers to calls that were either busy, disconnected, terminated after 10 rings or about 1 minute because no one answered, or placed on hold for 2 minutes or longer.

Our estimates of easy-access rates and the associated sampling errors computed at the 95-percent level of statistical confidence are presented in table I.2. That is, the odds are 19 out of 20 that the actual performance rate for each facility type would be within the range resulting from adding and subtracting the sampling error from the estimate.

Table I.2: Easy-Access Rates and Associated Sampling Errors, by Facility Type

Figures represent percent of calls placed (sampling errors in parentheses)

Facility type	Easy-access rate	Calls straight through	Calls on hold less than 2 minutes
TSCs	66.5 (2.2)	45.0 (2.4)	21.5 (2.2)
Statewide units	58.2 (3.8)	35.1 (3.4)	23.1 (3.6)
Mini-TSCs	44.0 (5.5)	16.4 (4.3)	27.6 (4.8)
Local offices	82.6 (2.7)	76.5 (3.1)	6.1 (1.8)
Total	**70.9** (1.6)	**54.9** (1.7)	**16.0** (1.8)

In placing our calls, we used microcomputers and a special program designed to record and compile the results. The program automatically timed the number of seconds each call was placed on hold and terminated any call on hold for 6 minutes. For each call, we collected data on

- busy signals,
- calls terminated after 10 rings (about 1 minute) because no one answered,
- calls disconnected before being answered,
- calls answered without being placed on hold,
- calls placed on hold,
- calls disconnected while on hold, and
- wait time on hold.

For calls that received a busy signal, we placed the call again within the same 15-minute interval to determine if we would get a busy signal again.

During the test, when we made contact with an SSA representative, we asked a question primarily to bring the call to a close. By design, the questions chosen were considered not difficult to answer because we did not want to be put on hold while the SSA employee researched the answer. For example, one question was, "What documentation do I need to get my 4-year-old child a social security number." Answer, "Birth certificate and a second form of identification (e.g., immunization records)."

TSC Access Rates for May 1985 and May 1988

Table II.1: TSC Easy-Access Rates

Figures represent percent of calls placed

TSC	Total easy-access rate		Calls straight through		Calls on hold less than 2 minutes	
	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88
Grand Prairie, TX	96.7	95.5	95.0	72.7	1.7	22.7
Atlanta, GA	93.4	48.9	66.7	24.4	26.7	24.4
St. Louis, MO	93.3	81.8	78.3	56.8	15.0	25.0
Upper Darby, PA	91.7	79.4	71.7	52.9	20.0	26.5
Phoenix, AZ	91.5	78.6	76.3	71.4	15.3	7.1
Pittsburgh, PA	90.2	93.2	41.0	77.3	49.2	15.9
Houston, TX	90.0	97.7	68.3	93.2	21.7	4.5
Des Moines, IA	89.8	77.3	55.9	36.4	33.9	40.9
Kansas City, MO	89.7	86.7	69.0	57.8	20.7	28.9
New Orleans, LA	88.2	93.5	72.9	76.1	15.3	17.4
Twin Cities, MN	87.7	83.7	64.9	62.8	22.8	20.9
Indianapolis, IN	86.6	90.7	68.3	86.0	18.3	4.7
Tampa, FL	85.2	76.1	50.0	47.8	35.2	28.4
Portland, OR	84.7	33.3	55.9	8.9	28.8	24.4
Chicago (N), IL	83.3	91.1	60.0	53.3	23.3	37.8
Detroit, MI	81.7	88.2	70.0	66.2	11.7	22.1
Seattle, WA	81.6	11.6	3.3	0.0	78.3	11.6
Los Angeles, CA	81.4	35.3	66.1	26.5	15.3	8.8
Westminster, MD	81.3	64.4	61.0	40.0	20.3	24.4
Milwaukee, WI	81.0	92.5	50.0	77.5	31.0	15.0
Berkeley, CA	78.7	95.6	60.7	64.7	18.0	30.9
Boston, MA	77.6	75.6	56.9	53.3	20.7	22.2
Manassas, VA	76.3	72.7	47.5	61.4	28.8	11.4
Golden, CO	71.8	68.9	43.6	46.7	28.2	22.2
Chicago (S), IL	68.9	76.2	44.8	52.4	24.1	23.8
San Diego, CA	68.9	35.6	41.0	15.6	27.9	20.0
Jamaica, NY	67.3	42.0	48.3	21.7	19.0	20.3
Cleveland, OH	66.7	84.4	36.7	71.1	30.0	13.3
Ft. Lauderdale, FL	65.0	53.3	40.0	31.1	25.0	22.2
Buffalo, NY	63.8	82.2	1.7	20.0	62.1	62.2
Lodi, NJ	49.2	6.7	37.7	4.4	11.5	2.2
Cincinnati, OH	41.7	77.8	21.7	42.2	20.0	35.6
Parlin, NJ	32.7	51.2	22.4	25.6	10.3	25.6
Jersey City, NJ	25.8	51.1	8.6	26.7	17.2	24.4
Overall results	**73.1**	**66.5**	**50.6**	**45.0**	**22.5**	**21.5**

Table II.2: TSC Difficult-Access Rates

Figures represent percent of calls placed

TSC	Total difficult-access rate		Busy calls		Disconnected/ terminated calls		Calls on hold 2 minutes or longer	
	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88
Jersey City, NJ	74.1	48.9	13.8	24.4	6.9	8.9	53.4	15.6
Parlin, NJ	67.3	48.8	22.4	9.3	0	4.7	44.9	34.9
Cincinnati, OH	58.3	22.2	21.7	6.7	3.3	2.2	33.3	13.3
Lodi, NJ	50.8	93.3	16.4	35.6	19.7	17.8	14.7	40.0
Buffalo, NY	36.2	17.8	12.1	6.7	0	11.1	24.1	0
Ft. Lauderdale, FL	35.0	46.7	10.0	17.8	6.7	0	18.3	28.9
Cleveland, OH	33.3	15.6	6.6	0	10.0	8.9	16.7	6.7
Jamaica, NY	32.7	58.0	10.3	13.0	12.1	14.5	10.3	30.4
San Diego, CA	31.1	64.4	8.2	57.8	0	0	22.9	6.7
Chicago (S), IL	31.0	23.8	3.4	19.0	5.2	0	22.4	4.8
Golden, CO	28.2	31.1	7.7	11.1	0	0	20.5	20.0
Manassas, VA	23.7	27.3	11.9	22.7	3.4	0	8.4	4.5
Boston, MA	22.4	24.4	1.7	2.2	1.7	4.4	19.0	17.8
Berkeley, CA	21.3	4.4	3.3	0	8.2	4.4	9.8	0
Milwaukee, WI	19.0	7.5	6.9	5.0	1.7	2.5	10.4	0
Westminster, MD	18.7	35.6	16.9	15.6	0	0	1.8	20.0
Los Angeles, CA	18.6	64.7	10.2	30.9	1.7	11.8	6.7	22.1
Detroit, MI	18.3	11.8	6.7	7.4	1.6	0	10.0	4.4
Seattle, WA	18.3	88.4	8.3	55.8	0	0	10.0	32.6
Chicago (N), IL	16.7	8.9	3.3	6.7	5.0	0	8.4	2.2
Portland, OR	15.3	66.7	8.5	20.0	0	2.2	6.8	44.4
Tampa, FL	14.8	23.9	7.4	7.5	1.8	1.5	5.6	14.9
Indianapolis, IN	13.3	9.3	6.7	4.7	1.6	2.3	5.0	2.3
Twin Cities, MN	12.3	16.3	0	0	1.7	2.3	10.6	14.0
New Orleans, LA	11.9	6.5	1.7	0	3.4	6.5	6.8	0
Kansas City, MO	10.3	13.3	3.4	0	3.4	2.2	3.5	11.1
Des Moines, IA	10.2	22.7	0	2.3	3.4	0	6.8	20.5
Houston, TX	10.0	2.3	10.0	2.3	0	0	0	0
Pittsburgh, PA	9.8	6.8	6.5	2.3	3.3	2.3	0	2.3
Phoenix, AZ	8.5	21.4	5.1	9.5	1.7	4.8	1.7	7.1
Upper Darby, PA	8.3	20.6	6.7	4.4	0	0	1.6	16.2
Atlanta, GA	6.7	51.1	5.0	24.4	1.7	6.7	0	20.0
St. Louis, MO	6.7	18.2	3.3	6.8	1.7	2.3	1.7	9.1
Grand Prairie, TX	3.3	4.5	0	4.5	3.3	0	0	0
Overall results	**26.9**	**33.5**	**8.9**	**13.5**	**4.2**	**4.6**	**13.8**	**15.4**

Statewide Unit Access for May 1985 and May 1988

Table III.1: Statewide Unit Easy-Access Rates

Figures represent percent of calls placed

Statewide unit	Easy-access rate		Calls straight through		Calls on hold less than 2 minutes	
	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88
New Mexico	97.4	78.6	71.1	59.5	26.3	19.0
Wyoming	92.5	95.3	82.5	88.4	10.0	7.0
Utah	86.5	69.0	37.8	59.5	48.7	9.5
Idaho	78.9	16.3	55.3	0.0	23.6	16.3
North Dakota	78.9	56.3	55.2	25.0	23.7	31.3
Nebraska	77.5	74.4	25.0	39.5	52.5	34.9
South Dakota	71.0	55.8	57.9	46.5	13.1	9.3
Montana	73.2	68.4	41.5	36.8	31.7	31.6
New Hampshire[a]	69.2	24.4	25.6	7.3	43.6	17.1
Vermont[a]	57.5	37.0	10.0	7.4	47.5	29.6
Kansas	54.0	93.0	24.3	48.8	29.7	44.2
Maine[a]	7.7	30.2	5.1	2.3	2.6	27.9
Overall results	**58.5**	**58.2**	**31.7**	**35.1**	**26.8**	**23.1**

[a]A single answering unit (Maine) currently answers the calls for Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. These calls are made to a single 800 number. In 1985, each state had a separate answering unit and number.

Table III.2: Statewide Unit Difficult-Access Rates

Figures represent percent of calls placed

Statewide unit	Difficult-access rate		Busy calls		Disconnected/terminated calls		Calls on hold 2 minutes or longer	
	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88
Maine[a]	92.3	69.8	43.5	58.1	25.7	7.0	23.1	4.7
Kansas	46.0	7.0	24.3	0.0	13.5	0.0	8.2	7.0
Vermont[a]	42.5	63.0	27.5	44.4	2.5	7.4	12.5	11.1
New Hampshire[a]	30.8	75.6	20.5	34.1	0	9.8	10.3	31.7
Montana	26.8	31.6	9.8	15.8	0	0.0	17.0	15.8
South Dakota	29.0	44.2	26.3	41.9	2.7	2.3	0	0.0
Nebraska	22.5	25.6	5.0	7.0	2.5	0.0	15.0	18.6
North Dakota	21.1	43.8	10.5	9.4	5.3	12.5	5.3	21.9
Idaho	21.1	83.7	7.9	16.3	5.3	4.7	7.9	62.8
Utah	13.5	31.0	2.7	4.8	0	23.8	10.8	2.4
Wyoming	7.5	4.7	7.5	4.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
New Mexico	2.6	21.4	0	9.5	0	4.8	2.6	7.1
Overall results	**41.5**	**41.8**	**20.4**	**20.5**	**8.0**	**5.8**	**13.1**	**15.4**

[a]A single answering unit (Maine) currently answers the calls for Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont These calls are made to a single 800 number. In 1985, each state had a separate answering unit and number

Regional Comparisons of Easy Access for May 1985 and May 1988

Figures represent percent of calls placed

Region	Overall access rate				By facility type							
					TSCs		Statewide units		Mini-TSCs		Local offices	
	May 85	Rank	May 88	Rank	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88	May 85	May 88
Seattle	83.3	(1)	42.9	(10)	83.0	26.1	78.9	16.3			91.0	67.7
Philadelphia	80.8	(2)	78.5	(4)	84.6	80.1					78.0	76.6
Dallas	80.0	(3)	87.3	(1)	92.0	96.1	97.4	78.6	13.0	17.8	77.7	87.6
Kansas City	78.0	(4)	84.0	(2)	91.3	81.9	61.6	83.7			94.9	86.7
Denver	76.4	(5)	75.7	(5)	71.8	68.9	80.1	69.0	70.0	38.7	85.9	90.7
Atlanta	75.8	(6)	71.8	(7)	78.1	67.5			70.7	35.8	75.8	83.3
San Francisco	75.8	(7)	70.2	(8)	80.9	64.0			66.7	49.0	58.3	81.4
Chicago	70.0	(8)	83.3	(3)	73.8	85.4			42.6	69.5	70.3	83.0
Boston	57.5	(9)	72.4	(6)	77.6	75.6	26.0	30.6			76.6	74.3
New York	49.5	(10)	58.9	(9)	44.6	38.2					75.9	84.9

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