



Highlights of [GAO-03-920](#), a report to the Committee on the Judiciary and the Subcommittee on Social Security, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Since September 11, 2001, more attention has been focused on the importance of identifying people who use false identity information or documents to obtain a driver license. The Social Security Administration (SSA) offers states a service to verify social security numbers (SSNs) collected during the driver licensing process. This report examines states' use of SSA's verification service, factors that may affect the usefulness of the service, and other tools states use or need to verify identity.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that SSA develop performance measures to assess the quality of its service, develop a strategy to decrease the verification failure rate, and modify its batch method to match requests against death records. SSA disagreed on developing performance measures for this purpose but agreed it should develop a strategy for improving the verification rate and begin matching batch requests against death records. However, SSA stated that limits in law and systems priorities could restrict the actions it could take.

Given the homeland security implications associated with states' inability to exchange information on all drivers, GAO recommends that the Congress, in partnership with the states, consider authorizing the development of a national data sharing system.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-920.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Barbara Bovbjerg at (202) 512-7215 or bovbjergb@gao.gov.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS

Improved SSN Verification and Exchange of States' Driver Records Would Enhance Identity Verification

What GAO Found

GAO found that 25 states have used either one or both of the methods SSA offers for requesting SSN verification. Over the last several years, states used the batch and on-line method to submit over 84 million and 13 million requests, respectively. Although on-line use has been increasing, usage varied significantly among states, with 5 out of 18 states submitting over 70 percent of all requests. States decide to use SSA's service based on various factors, such as costs and state priorities.

Weaknesses in SSA's design and management of its SSN verification service have contributed to capacity and performance problems and limited its usefulness. While SSA recently increased systems capacity and reduced outages, problems remain. For example:

- The level of service cannot be assessed because SSA has not established key performance measures.
- States are concerned that the high verification failure rate adds to their workloads. Several states noted that some of the failures could be prevented if SSA disclosed more information to states.
- States using the batch method are vulnerable to licensing individuals using SSNs of deceased persons because SSA does not match requests against its death files. In fact, GAO obtained licenses using fraudulent documents and deceased persons' SSNs in 2 states.

Driver licensing agencies rely primarily on visual inspection of documents such as birth certificates, driver licenses, and U.S. immigration documents to verify applicants' identity. While states may use safeguards beyond visual inspection to verify documents, they lack the ability to systematically exchange identity information on all drivers with other states. Without a means to readily share all driver records, states face a greater risk for identity theft and fraud in the driver licensing process. A recent Department of Transportation report to Congress identified options that would provide states a system for exchanging records on all drivers and could help mitigate identity fraud.

Example of Identity Information That Driver License May Contain



Source: GAO.