

## Social Security Advocacy Services Newsletter

November/December 2024

Social Security Advocacy Services (SSAS) is dedicated to assisting Minnesotans with the Social Security disability benefits process so they can secure stable housing, live in dignity, and achieve their highest potential.

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*The Social Security Advocacy Services team wishes you a winter filled with joy, warmth, and abundance. As we approach winter holidays and the year's end, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all you've done this year to help people with disabilities in Minnesota apply for or keep Social Security disability benefits.*

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## Grantee Spotlight

This section of our newsletter spotlights a Department of Human Services-contracted Social Security Advocacy Services grantee to promote fostering of partnerships and open communication among all grantees.



**Agency name:** Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services

**Contact information:** 763-271-3700 or 800-284-7425

**Website:** [www.cmjts.org](http://www.cmjts.org)

**Service provided:**

Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services, Inc. (CMJTS) is a nonprofit employment and training agency and a partner in the Minnesota CareerForce System. For the past 40 years, CMJTS has provided quality training, career guidance, and job placement services to thousands of people across Central Minnesota. As a partner of Local Workforce Development Area 5, they serve 11 counties in central Minnesota: Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, Mille Lacs, Pine, Renville, Sherburne, and Wright.

CMJTS currently employs two Social Security Advocates, whose primary role is to help clients overcome barriers related to obtaining and retaining benefits from Social

Security administered programs. They provide non-attorney representation for initial applications, reconsiderations, and continuing disability reviews. Their hands-on assistance includes helping to thoroughly complete applications, scheduling, and conducting phone appointments, filling out and submitting Social Security forms, communicating with Social Security staff, and coordinating with Disability Determination Services' examiners.

CMJTS is dedicated to transforming lives and empowering individuals to reach their full potential. Among its many impactful initiatives, the organization places a strong emphasis on disability services, providing essential support and resources that enhance the quality of life for those with disabilities. By fostering an inclusive and nurturing environment, CMJTS is not just offering a service; it's igniting hope, inspiring independence, and creating pathways for a brighter future.

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## Contract spotlight: Accessibility

As a reminder, in the General Duties section, found in most contracts under Clause 2.5, states a grantee must comply with [Minnesota IT \(MN.IT\) Accessibility Standards](#). This includes any information systems, tools, content, and work products produced under the contract, including but not limited to software applications, web sites, video, learning modules, webinars, presentations, etc.



This web page provides all the information you will need to make your correspondence accessible for all individuals who may have digital barriers. There is an option on this web page to subscribe to the Minnesota IT monthly newsletter and we highly encourage you to do this.

It is very important that you are aware of all the services and deliverables within your agency's contract with the Department of Human Services. If you do not have a copy of your agency's current contract, please contact your assigned coordinator for a copy.

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## Updated SSA-1696 form released

On Dec. 9, 2024, Social Security released an updated [SSA-1696 Claimant's Appointment of a Representative](#) form. You must use the updated SSA-1696 and

discontinue using the prior edition (08-2020) for any new clients you will be working with.

The updated SSA-1696 form has a new look to it. We have created this [hand-out](#) which provides instructions on how to properly complete the updated SSA-1696 form.

Additionally, Social Security issued a Chief Judge Bulletin, [CJB 24-02](#), which provides further instructions about the requirement to use the updated SSA-1696 form and when they will send out the incomplete1696 notice.

If you have any questions, please contact your assigned coordinator, Vang Her, Tony Reynero, or Jennifer Youngstrom.

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## SSAS invoice approval summary

### October 2024

A total of 107 invoices submitted by 18 grantees were approved.

Initial application/reconsiderations	85
ALJ hearing level	22
Appeals Council level	0
Continuing Disability Review (CDR)	0
CDR at ALJ hearing level	0

### November 2024

A total of 107 invoices submitted by 16 grantees were approved.

Initial application/reconsiderations	85
ALJ hearing level	20
Appeals Council level	0

Continuing Disability Review (CDR) 1

CDR at ALJ hearing level 1

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## New Social Security in-office changes

Effective Nov. 8, 2024, the Social Security Administration (SSA) began moving to an appointment focused service delivery model for their field offices and card centers.



The service model's goal is to reduce wait times at SSA's offices. Some Minnesota SSA offices have already started using this service model. By Jan. 2025 an appointment will be required for most services at any SSA field office. To help educate the public, SSA is posting this [notice](#) in their field offices and card centers.

Further details of this new service model can be found in SSA's emergency message, [EM 24059](#). The message also includes information and links to many of Social Security's online services. Due to this change, it is no longer best practice to send your clients to walk into a Social Security field office. Instead, you or your clients will need to call Social Security to schedule an appointment if the service cannot be completed online.

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## National Disability Forum

In November, Social Security's National Disability Forum (NDF), held the second of two sessions on removing barriers to accessing services in Tribal communities. The goal of the NDF is to provide a forum that allows SSA stakeholders to hear different perspectives on issues from members of the public and from one another. The NDF gives interested stakeholders an opportunity to share their unique insights on topics of particular interest to Social Security early in the process and directly with policymakers.

Social Security attempts to hold at least three NDF's annually. You can learn more about the National Disability Forums, including video and transcripts from prior forums at the [National Disability Forum website](#).

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## Social Security Advocacy Services team trainings



### Technical Assistance (TA) bi-monthly sessions

On the third **THURSDAY** in odd months from 1:30 to 3 p.m., the Social Security Advocacy Services team offers trainings and opportunities for Q&A to our contracted Social Security advocates.

Our next technical assistance training will be **Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025**. Kelly Melcher, Digital Accessibility Coordinator with the Department of Human Services, will be presenting on *Digital Accessibility Basics*. You can register for this technical assistance session at this [link](#).

If you are interested in presenting at an upcoming TA session on any topic related to Social Security advocacy services, please contact Tony Reynero at [antonio.reynero@state.mn.us](mailto:antonio.reynero@state.mn.us).

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## Social Security Administration updates



### Social Security Advocates

In the last couple months, Social Security has issued many Dear Colleague letters about changes in their policies and new informational articles. This includes new toolkits, new and updated overpayment waiver policies, update on the manner of appearance for hearings, recognizing national homelessness awareness month, guidelines for limited English proficiency interviewing situations, and more. Visit the [Advocate's webpage](#) to read all these important updates.

### New Social Security Ruling

Effective Jan. 6, 2025, Social Security is rescinding rule [SSR 00-4p](#) and replacing it with new ruling [SSR 24-3p](#) for titles II and XVI and the use of occupational information and vocational evidence, and other reliable occupational information in disability decisions. This means that Social Security will no longer only rely on the Dictionary of Occupational Titles and the Selected Characteristics of Occupations, they will now use

additional vocational data sources. Vocational data is used at all levels of disability claim when deciding steps 4 and 5 of the 5-step sequential evaluation process.

### **Program Operations Manual (POMS) updates**

In the last couple months, Social Security has issued over 50 recent changes to POMS. Many of the changes include representation of claimants, waiver provisions for overpayments, SSI underpayments, and more. For a complete list of all POMS updates, visit Social Security's [POMS recent changes](#) webpage.

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### **Social Security Advocacy Services resources**

Additional resources can be found at the Minnesota Department of Human Services webpage [Social Security Advocacy Services: Policies and procedures for contracted grantees](#).

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