

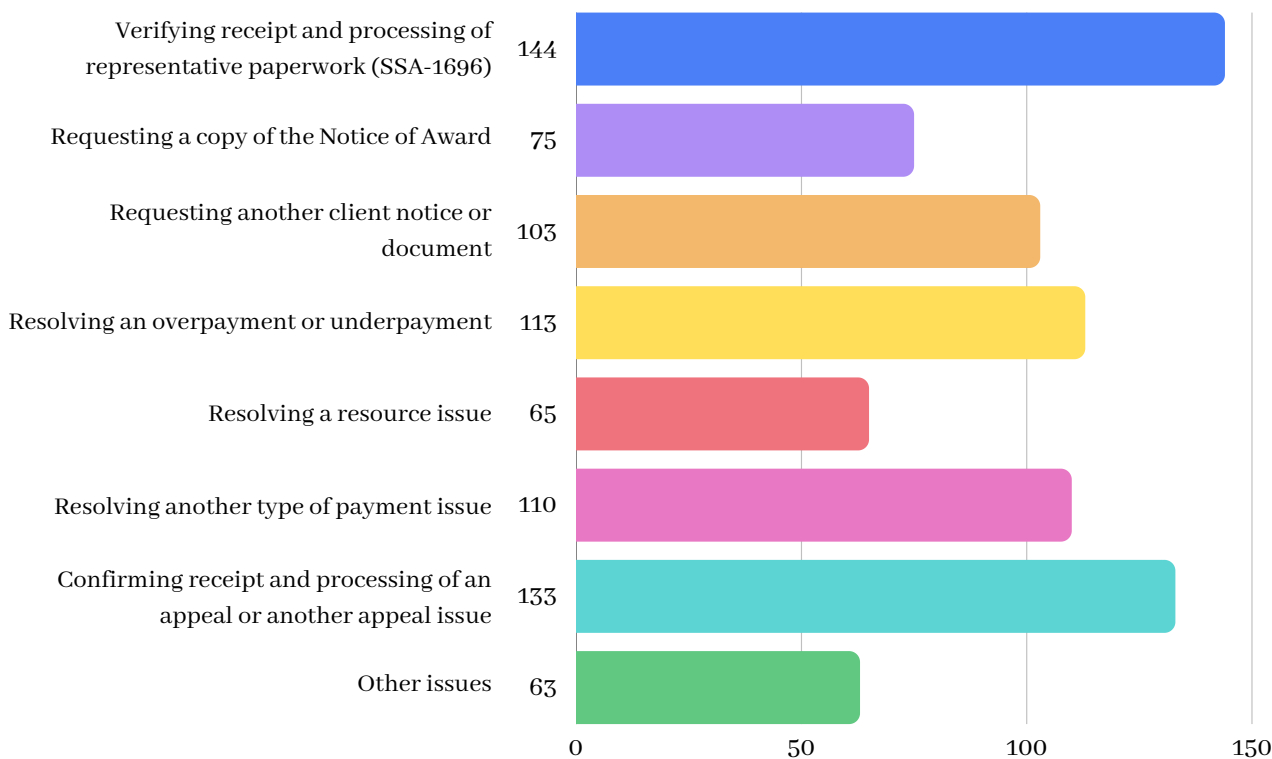
Social Security Administration Customer Service Challenges: Survey Responses from Advocates and Representatives in the Field

June 2026

Over the last eighteen months, the Social Security Administration (SSA) has focused attention on service for most customers, expanding online services through *MySocialSecurity* accounts and rolling out artificial intelligence capacity to handle some phone inquiries. Now, SSA has asked about other frontiers for service reforms, including for harder to reach, harder to serve customers.

In May 2026, the National Coalition of Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Advocates, comprised of more than five hundred advocates from nonprofit legal services organizations and national aging and/or disability advocacy organizations, partnered with the National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives (NOSSCR) to conduct a survey of advocates and representatives who frequently interact with SSA. We received 187 responses from advocates and representatives in thirty-four states, plus Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico. We received responses from every region of the country, and from rural and urban communities alike. More than 50% of respondents reported contacting SSA more than twenty times over the previous six weeks.

The most frequent issues that prompted advocates and representatives to contact SSA included:

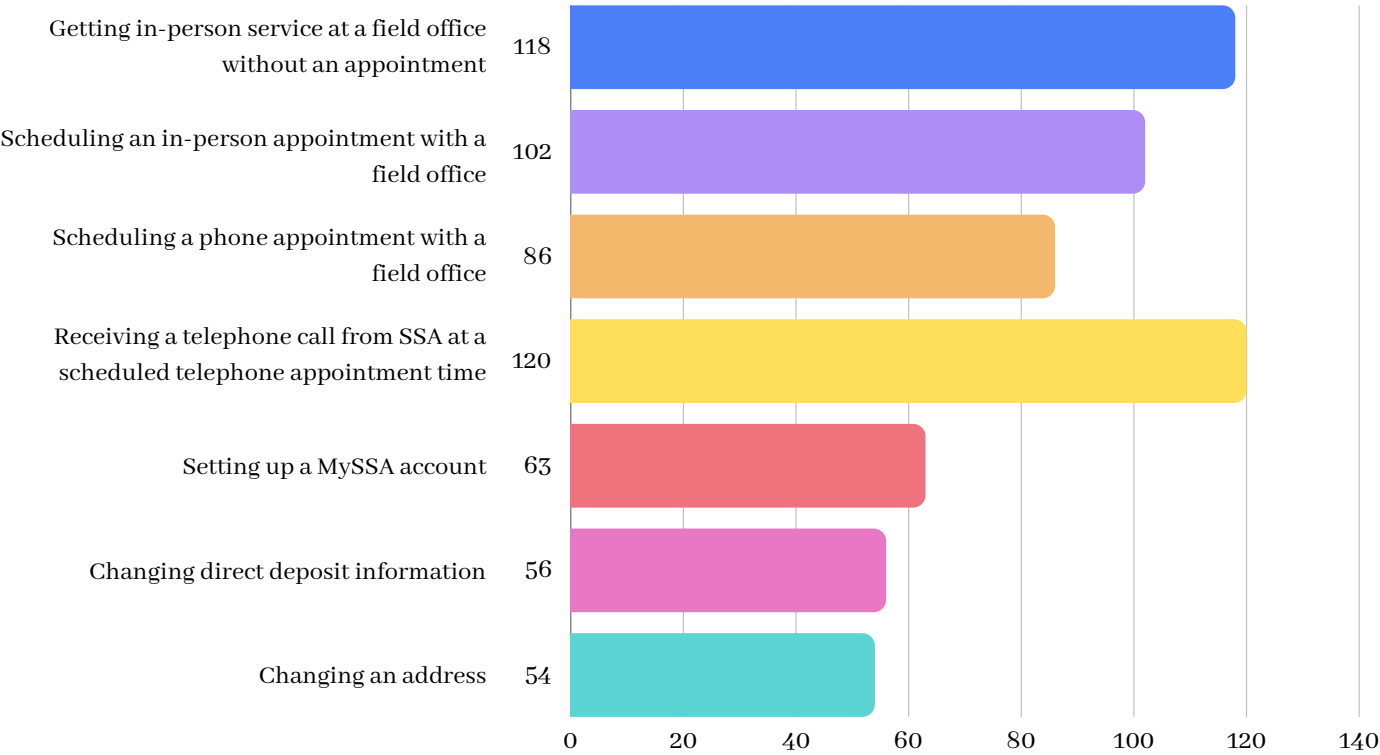


The most cited reason for representatives and advocates to contact SSA was to inquire about delays in the processing of Form SSA-1696. Currently there is no electronic process for ensuring a representative is attached to a claimant's file. Of the respondents who selected "Other Issues," advocates and representatives noted challenges included scheduling pre-effectuation review contacts (PERCs), attempting to confirm receipt or processing of paperwork, and resolving problems with attorney fees.

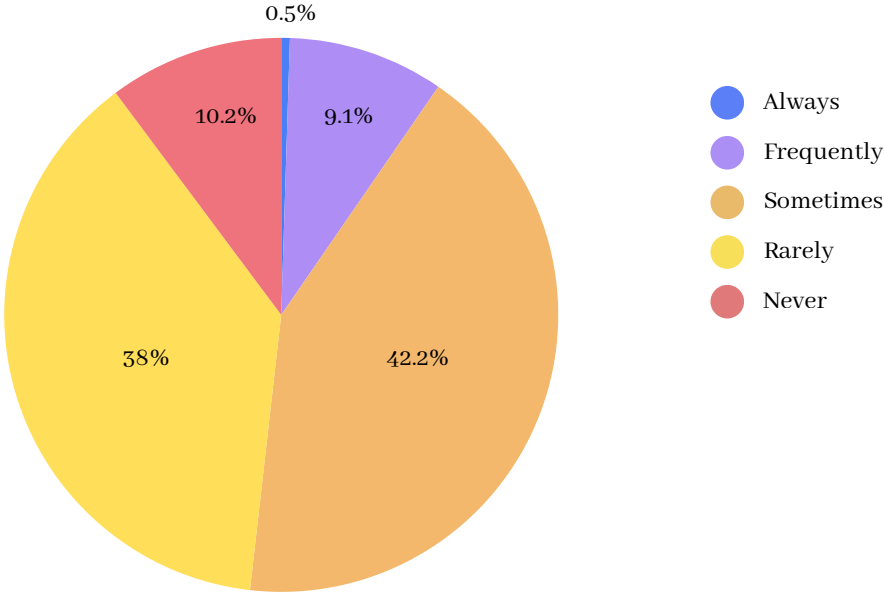
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A key takeaway from the survey is that, while SSA may be able to conduct business with many customers via the 1-800 number or *MySocialSecurity* accounts, there remains a significant need for advocates and representatives to interact with specific SSA personnel to assist with the efficient processing of disability applications and resolution of post-eligibility issues. Respondents reported that that their clients had faced issues with the following SSA processes since April 1, 2026:



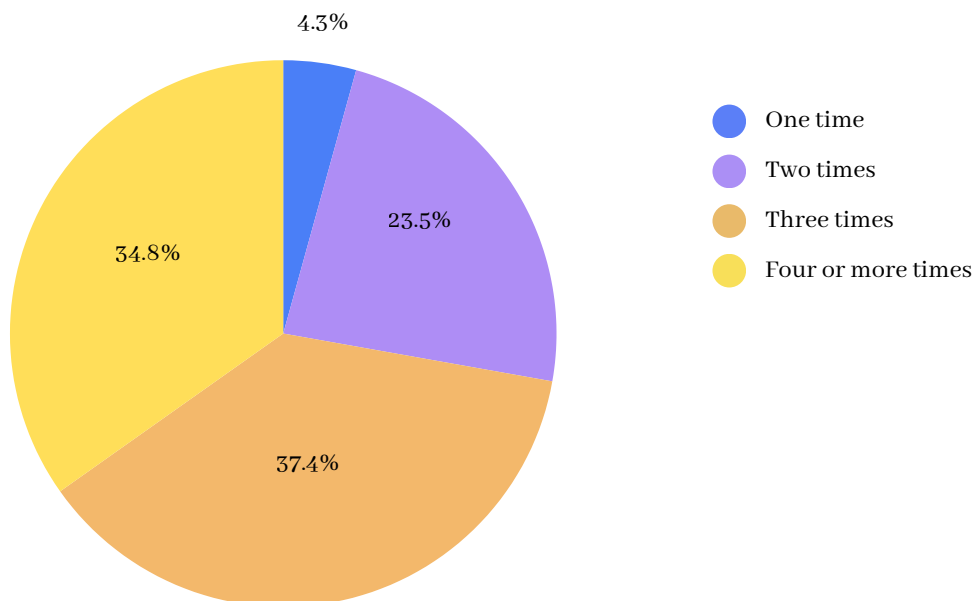
When our clients cannot conduct business with SSA, they turn to their advocates and representatives to step in. Nearly 50% of respondents noted that they were “rarely” or “never” able to resolve their clients’ issues with just one contact to SSA.



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More than one-third of respondents needed to contact SSA an average of three times to resolve a client issue. More than one-third of respondents needed to contact SSA an average of four or more times. Altogether, more than 70% of respondents reported being unable to resolve their clients' issues in two or fewer attempts.



The survey asked respondents to provide more information about the problems they are having in resolving client issues with SSA. Among the responses, some key themes emerged:

1. When SSA routes calls to other field offices, advocates and representatives often face barriers to resolving client issues quickly, requiring repeated callbacks.

"Every single time my call has been answered by someone who did not work at the field office assigned to the case, the person answering the call has said that the local office would need to provide me further information that they did not have access to. This necessitates an endless round of trying to reach someone at the assigned field office when calls are routed elsewhere." - Seattle, Washington

"SSA employees are rarely willing to resolve issues that occur in other field offices, even though we have no control over whether our calls are transferred to another office than the one we called." - St. Paul, Minnesota

"Not being able to directly access a specific local office makes things difficult, cumbersome, and time consuming since the random person answering the phone in another office can't help. It wastes so much time." - Shepherdsville, Kentucky

"Being rerouted to a non-local office makes it impossible to 1) get SSA to take key actions, like processing pay continuation or stopping overpayment recovery; or 2) get accurate information about case status; or 3) reschedule meetings." - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"Clients are now getting through to representatives from other offices who say that they cannot assist. Although call wait times may be going down, callers are not getting help once they get through." - Burlington, Vermont

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2. Advocates and representatives report uneven training and difficulties getting clear and correct information from SSA staff, necessitating multiple contacts.

"Claimants are frustrated by getting a different answer or different status with each different SSA employee they speak with. We have a case in which benefits were awarded to a deceased claimant eighteen months ago, and to date nothing has been paid. The surviving child was substituted in, an SSA-1724 was completed and submitted three times, all required forms and documents are in and have been in for eighteen months, yet on each contact the child is told: the case was never there, the case is there and was paid, the case is there but no work has been done and it's unclear why; and that no SSA-1724 was received, no, wait, it was, no, wait, here are all three." - Raleigh, North Carolina

"Clients frequently are given a different answer to their question or issue by each person they talk to and are often given inaccurate information, like nonexistent form numbers or wrong SSI program details." - Grand Rapids, Michigan

"My clients and our office have experienced inconsistent responses from SSA representatives. Many times, a representative's response conflicts with the POMS." - Atlanta, Georgia

3. Advocates and representatives expressed particular frustration with delayed PERCs and other post-eligibility payment issues.

"We are experiencing delays in getting PERC appointments scheduled. Last week, we had a client who was offered a PERC appointment three months out, which means an additional three months without income." - Oakland, California

"My client had a PERC in April and was told no documentation was needed and that the claim would be closed out that day. To date, the claim is still open, he has not received his benefits or Notice of Award, and every time I call SSA I'm routed to an out of state field office with a rep that can't help aside from sending a message to the claims rep in question." - Portland, Oregon

"A client was contacted by the Fremont field office back in February to conduct his PERC call; however, the client felt that he needed a payee and said he ended the PERC halfway through because he wanted the person he wanted to appoint as his payee or his attorney on the line. When I called to reschedule, the PERC was rescheduled for a call later in April; however, no one was ever contacted by the Fremont field office at the scheduled appointment time. When I called the Fremont field office to report this issue and once again reschedule the PERC, I was informed that is not possible because the client completed the PERC in February and we failed to provide the requested information (which the client did not know was requested because he needs assistance with his affairs), so the claim was denied. The rep instead scheduled us for a call with the Hayward field office, which immediately helped address the outstanding issues and schedule us for an appointment with the appropriate claims specialist at the Fremont field office in July (which is what we were requesting initially)." - Berkeley, California

Throughout their survey responses, respondents stressed their desire to work closely with SSA to resolve clients' issues without repeated follow-up, saving time for advocates, representatives, and SSA staff alike. In a significant number of responses, respondents noted that streamlined pathways for communications – dedicated phone numbers or electronic communication tools for advocates and representatives – could be a “win-win” by eliminating duplicative work for all.