SOUTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Legislative Audit Council

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DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES AT THE S.C. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT

Legislative Audit Council

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Legislative Audit Council

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Introduction and Background

Audit Objectives

Under S.C. Code §2-2-60(D), the S.C. House of Representatives Government Efficiency and Legislative Oversight Committee requested the Legislative Audit Council (LAC) to conduct an audit of the State Disability Determination Services (SC DDS) program administered by the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD). The request asked for the audit to examine the leadership and operational management of the agency's disability determination services, to identify factors contributing to excessive processing times for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) claims, and to present recommendations for resolving excessive processing times and claim backlogs.

Our objectives for this audit were to:

- Examine the leadership and operational management of the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department's Disability Determination Services.
- Determine reasons for significant wait times associated with the disability determination process and identify strategies to decrease processing times and backlogs for Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance claims.

Scope and Methodology

The period of our review was generally 2021 to 2026, with consideration of earlier or later periods, when relevant to the audit objectives. We used the following sources as evidence:

- Interviews with SCVRD and SC DDS employees, interested parties, and employees of other state entities.
- State laws and regulations.
- Federal laws, including the Social Security Act and its regulations.
- Social Security Administration (SSA) Program Operations Manual System (POMS).
- LAC survey of SC DDS disability examiners.
- Publicly available SSA processing time and claimant data.
- SC DDS internal processing time reports.

Criteria used to measure performance included primarily state and federal laws, SSA policies, and the practices of other states and organizations. We reviewed internal controls in several areas. Our findings are detailed in the report.

We also interviewed staff regarding various information systems used by SCVRD and SC DDS to determine how data are maintained and what levels of control are in place. We identified no ongoing legal proceedings and, as a result, have not considered those in relation to our audit objectives.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those generally accepted government auditing 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 objectives. We believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

S.C. Code §2-15-50(b)(2) requires us to review the effectiveness of organizations, programs, activities, or functions to determine if they should be continued, revised, or eliminated. We did not conclude from this review that SCVRD or SC DDS should be eliminated; however, we have recommendations for improvement.

Scope Impairments

SC DDS operates under strict oversight by SSA. As a result, SSA reviewed almost all requests for information made to SC DDS throughout the course of the audit. For more information on the relationship between SC DDS, SCVRD, and SSA, refer to Chapter 1, *Background* and Chapter 2, *SC DDS Structure and Leadership.*

Generally accepted auditing standards require us to report significant constraints imposed upon the audit approach that limit our ability to address audit objectives. Significant constraints may include denials of, or excessive delays in, access to certain records or individuals. We experienced both denials and delays throughout our audit. These constraints significantly impacted our ability to complete our audit objectives.

Data Denials

SSA denied access to nearly all data we requested regarding disability determination services claim processing times and backlogs, as demonstrated by Charts 1.1 and 1.2.

Chart 1.1: Initial Request for Information Denial

LAC Request	SSA Response
January 21, 2026	**March 3, 2026**
All reports compiled and generated by SCVRD regarding disability determination services, including reporting designed to meet federal requirements. Reports should cover FY 23-24 to the current fiscal year.	SSA's disability determination data is protected by the Privacy Act of 1974, the Social Security Act, the Internal Revenue Code, and other laws, and SSA lacks authority to share information from these systems for the purpose of the audit described in the May 12, 2025 letter [audit request from House Government Efficiency and Legislative Oversight Committee] provided to SSA.
Any lists or databases of individuals awaiting determination. Individuals may be identified with their names or through client numbers/case numbers.	

Source: LAC request for information and SSA response.

Chart 1.2: Follow-up Request for Information Denial

LAC Request	SSA Response
May 26, 2026	**June 17, 2026**
The number of SC DDS claims submitted to DDS from CY 2021 – current. Please categorize these claims by initial, reconsideration, and CDR case types, including: ▪ The number of pending claims at the end of each month. ▪ The number of new claims received monthly. ▪ The number of claims processed monthly. ▪ The number of approved and denied claims. ▪ The number of claims assigned to SC DDS that qualified for prioritized processing (CAL, QDD, TERI).	SSA's disability determination data is protected by the Privacy Act of 1974, the Social Security Act, the Internal Revenue Code, and other laws, and SSA lacks authority to share information from these systems for the purpose of the audit described in the May 26, 2026, letter provided to SSA.
Deidentified South Carolina disability claimant data: CY 2021 – current. Please include the following information: ▪ The case type and program applied for by the claimant, including whether the application was for an: ○ Initial case; SSDI, SSI, concurrent, SSDI DC [Disabled Child], or SSI DC [Disabled Child]. ○ Reconsideration case; SSDI, SSI, concurrent, SSDI DC, or SSI DC. ○ CDR case; SSDI, SSI, or concurrent. ▪ A complete timeline of each initial or CDR claimant's case, including dates for each stage of processing. The timeline should include, but is not limited to: ○ The date the claimant initially applied/SSA received the application. ○ The date of case receipt by DDS. ○ The date of assignment to a DDS examiner. ○ The date a medical determination was made. ▪ The dates of any medical records requests made. ▪ The dates of receipt for any medical records requested. ▪ The dates any consultative examinations were ordered, if applicable. ▪ The dates any consultative examinations were completed, if applicable. ○ The date the examiner determined eligibility. ○ The dates any additional information was requested from the claimant, and the dates of receipt by DDS for that information. ▪ A complete timeline of each reconsideration case, including dates for all applicable stages: ○ The date of initial denial. ○ The date the reconsideration was filed by the claimant. ○ The date notice of the reconsideration was received by DDS. ○ The date the reconsideration was approved/denied. ○ The date the claimant appeared before an ALJ. ○ The date of the ALJ's decision. ○ The date the claimant appeared before appeals council. ○ The date of the appeals council's decision. ○ The date the claimant appeared before the Supreme Court. ○ The date of the Supreme Court's decision.	
Any relevant disability determination progress reports or documentation for the period requested (CY 2021 to present), including: ▪ Monthly counts of staged/backlogged cases. ▪ Reports on pending or aged claims. ▪ Backlog reduction efforts through outsourcing (other states' DDS offices, SSA processing centers/associated users). ▪ State and Southeast/ATL regional reporting.	

Source: LAC request for information and SSA response.

Without the requested data, reasons for significant wait times associated with the disability determination process could not be fully determined. This directly impacted our ability to address our audit objectives. Chapter 2, *Inaccessible Processing Time Data* includes more detailed information regarding this scope impairment.

Delays

INITIAL INTERVIEWS – We were prevented from interviewing employees for more than a month after our entry conference with SC DDS. Our initial request for information was provided to SSA and SC DDS at the time of our entry conference on January 21, 2026. Following receipt of the request, SSA instructed SC DDS to delay scheduling any interviews with SC DDS employees until the SSA Office of General Counsel had an opportunity to review. However, SC DDS employees are state employees to whom we should have full access.

As a result of the SSA Office of General Counsel's review, we were not permitted to interview any SC DDS employees until March 2026. Our first interview was conducted on March 10, 2026.

INFORMATION FROM OTHER STATES – To identify strategies to decrease processing times and backlogs for Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance claims, we contacted other states in South Carolina's SSA Region (Atlanta). The states contacted included Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee. The contents of our request can be found in Figure 1.3.

We directly contacted the Disability Determination Services (DDS) office for each state. Five states responded that the request should be submitted through SSA's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) procedure, and one state responded that the request could be answered by SSA. Soon after, a representative from the SSA regional office informed us that we would need to submit separate FOIA requests for each state's information to SSA, instead of speaking with the states.

We submitted FOIA requests for each of the seven states to SSA on June 15, 2026. At the time of drafting our report (September 22, 2026), we had not received final responses from SSA for any of our FOIA requests. The contents of our FOIA requests can be found in Figure 1.4.

Figure 1.3: Request for Information to Other States

SOUTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Legislative Audit Council

Independence, Reliability, Integrity

K. Earle Powell
Director

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

We appreciate you taking the time to respond to our questions. We will use the information you share to gain a better understanding of disability determination services and identify opportunities for improvement in our state.

Under S.C. Code § 2-15-120, public disclosure of any record of the Legislative Audit Council, with the exception of the final audit report to the General Assembly, is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not more than $1,000.00 or one year in prison; dismissal from state employment or office; and five years' ineligibility for further state office. All responses to our request will remain confidential and we will not personally identify who we spoke with at your office. Our final report will only include summary information about how other states handle Disability Determination Services.

Please provide the South Carolina Legislative Audit Council with electronic copies of the following information and/or documents, files, records, etc., by **June 12, 2026**. *To maintain confidentiality, please do not provide any information that includes claimant Personally Identifiable Information (PII).*

- Information on each level of disability examiner positions in your office, including:
  - The number of employees at each level.
  - The number of vacancies at each level.
  - Average salary for each level of the position.
  - Education and experience requirements for each level of the position.
- Remote Work/Telecommuting Policy for Disability Determination Services employees.
  - Are any positions excluded from the policy? If so, which ones and why?
- Do you utilize any recruitment or retention strategies for Disability Determination Services Examiner positions? If so, what strategies and how effective do you feel they have been?
- What are the training requirements for Disability Determination Services Examiners?
  - What, if any, training standards or curricula are followed?
  - How long does initial training take?
  - Is additional training offered beyond the initial examiner training? Please explain.
- Please share successful methods that your state office has implemented to reduce case backlogs and minimize processing times. (Examples may include collaboration with other state agencies or the Social Security Administration (SSA), as well as the use of temporary salary adjustments or overtime.)
- Has your state ever assisted the South Carolina DDS with processing cases?
  - If yes, when?
  - How many cases did your office assist with?
  - Describe the working relationship between your state and SC DDS.
- To understand the strategies deployed by other states for tracking productivity, please provide any information or performance reports generated by your state office.
- For comparative analysis purposes, if permissible, please provide the average and median processing times for SSDI and SSI claims in your state as of April 30, 2026.
  - What stages of the process take the longest? Please provide any possible reasons.
- Any other relevant progress reports on disability determinations would be appreciated. This may include reports of monthly counts of staged or backlogged cases, or updates on pending or aged claims.

S.C. Code of Laws §2-15-120 makes public disclosure of any record of the Legislative Audit Council, with the exception of the final audit report to the General Assembly, a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not more than $1,000.00 or one year in prison; dismissal from state employment or office; and five years' ineligibility for further state office. The intended recipient of this e-mail has complete responsibility for the confidentiality of the records or information which have been made available and will be held liable under the provisions of §2-15-120 of the 1976 Code of Laws of South Carolina, as amended, for any unauthorized release of any record of the Legislative Audit Council.

Source: LAC.

Figure 1.4: FOIA Request to SSA

SOUTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Legislative Audit Council

Independence, Reliability, Integrity

K. Earle Powell
Director

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

June 15, 2026

In accordance with S.C. Code § 2-2-60(D), the S.C. House of Representatives Government Efficiency and Legislative Oversight Committee has requested the South Carolina Legislative Audit Council (SCLAC) conduct a performance audit of South Carolina Disability Determination Services (SC DDS) administered by the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD). Our audit plan includes the following objectives:

- Examine the leadership and operational management of the SCVRD SC DDS.
- Determine reasons for significant wait times associated with the disability determination process and identify strategies to decrease processing times for SSI and SSDI claims.

Following the guidance of [redacted] at the SSA Disability Adjudication Division (included as Attachment A to this request), the SCLAC is requesting the following information through FOIA. The SCLAC is requesting this information for all states included in SSA's Region 4 (Atlanta Region) to compare operations with SC DDS. From this, the SCLAC hopes to identify strategies already in use to decrease processing times for SSI and SSDI claims.

- A list of dates that hiring authority has been granted for [STATE NAME] from calendar year 2021 to present, including:
  - The positions for which [STATE NAME] was allowed to hire.
  - The number of each position for which [STATE NAME] was allowed to hire.
  - The dates by which [STATE NAME] was required to complete hiring.
- Information on each level of disability examiner positions in [STATE NAME], including:
  - The overall number of disability examiner employees.
  - The number of employees at each examiner level.
  - The number of vacancies at each level.
  - Average salary for each level of the position.
  - Education and experience requirements for each level of the position.
- Remote Work/Telecommuting Policy for [STATE NAME] employees.
  - Are any positions excluded from the policy? If so, which ones and why?
- Does [STATE NAME] utilize any recruitment or retention strategies for Disability Determination Services Examiner positions?
- What are the training requirements for Disability Determination Services Examiners for [STATE NAME]?
  - What, if any, training standards or curricula are followed?
  - How long does initial training take?
  - Is additional training offered beyond the initial examiner training? Please explain.
- Please share successful methods that [STATE NAME] has implemented to reduce case backlogs and minimize processing times. (Examples may include collaboration with other state agencies or SSA, as well as the use of temporary salary adjustments or overtime.)
- Has [STATE NAME] ever assisted SC DDS with processing cases?
  - If yes, when?
  - How many cases did [STATE NAME] assist with?
- To understand the strategies deployed by other states for tracking productivity, please provide any information or performance reports generated by [STATE NAME] addressing processing times for SSDI and SSI claims as of April 30, 2026.
- For comparative analysis purposes, please provide the average and median processing times for SSDI and SSI claims in [STATE NAME] as of April 30, 2026.
- Please provide reports addressing monthly counts of staged cases, backlogged cases, pending claims, or aged claims for [STATE NAME] from calendar year 2021 to April 30, 2026.

The SCLAC is also requesting a waiver or reduction of fees under 20 CFR 402.85, which can be found as Attachment B to this request. If there are any questions or concerns, please contact Jordan Kneece, Audit Manager, at jkneece@lac.sc.gov or (803) 545-0491. We appreciate your assistance with our request.

S.C. Code of Laws §2-15-120 makes public disclosure of any record of the Legislative Audit Council, with the exception of the final audit report to the General Assembly, a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not more than $1,000.00 or one year in prison; dismissal from state employment or office; and five years' ineligibility for further state office. The intended recipient of this e-mail has complete responsibility for the confidentiality of the records or information which have been made available and will be held liable under the provisions of §2-15-120 of the 1976 Code of Laws of South Carolina, as amended, for any unauthorized release of any record of the Legislative Audit Council.

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Note: Information was requested for Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee. [STATE NAME] is used as a placeholder for the purposes of this report.

Source: LAC.

The delays in receiving responses to our FOIA requests have resulted in denials of access to best practices and strategies from other states. This affected our ability to fully address our audit objective of identifying strategies to decrease processing times and backlogs for SSI and SSDI. We were also unable to compare the structure and leadership of SC DDS with other Southeastern states' DDSs. Chapter 2, *Human Resources' Impact on Processing Time* and Chapter 2, *SC DDS Structure and Leadership* include more detailed information regarding this scope impairment.

Background

SSA administers two programs that provide benefits based on disability: Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

> SSI (TITLE II OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT) – SSI provides for payment of disability benefits to disabled individuals who have contributed to the Social Security trust fund through their earnings, as well as to certain disabled dependents of qualifying individuals.
>
> SSDI (TITLE XVI OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT) – SSDI provides payments to disabled individuals (including children under the age of 18) who have limited income and resources.

For all individuals applying for SSI, and for all adults applying for SSDI, the definition of disability is the same. The law defines disability as:

> The inability to engage in any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.

For SSDI claims, a child under age 18 will be considered disabled if he or she has a medically-determinable physical or mental impairment or combination of impairments that causes marked and severe functional limitations, and that can be expected to cause death or that has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.

Determinations of Disability

Sections 221(a) and 1633 of the Social Security Act provide that disability determinations are made by the states, unless a state chooses otherwise. In South Carolina, disability claim determinations are made by SC DDS. SC DDS is housed within SCVRD.

SSA pays 100 percent of necessary costs incurred by the states performing the disability determination function; however, SC DDS is a state agency. SC DDS employees are state employees subject to South Carolina's approved standards for recruitment, tenure, and compensation.

SC DDS' disability examiners are responsible for reviewing applications for disability claims subject to federal laws, regulations, and SSA guidelines. For more information on the disability determination process, refer to Chapter 2, *Disability Claim Processing*.

LAC Survey

We conducted a survey of SC DDS' disability examiners between June 18, 2026 and July 1, 2026, using SurveyMonkey®. We sent the survey to all 92 currently working SC DDS disability examiners. Our survey addressed the disability determination process and SC DDS management.

The survey had a response rate of 88% (81 respondents of 92 disability examiners). Three individuals began but did not complete the survey; their responses have been filtered out from the results and our response rate. The results of the survey are in Appendix A. Respondents were informed that their responses would remain confidential; therefore, open-ended responses have been summarized and referenced throughout the report to preserve anonymity for those who participated.

Disability Claim Processing

Disability Claim Processing

To determine the process for each type of disability claim, we reviewed the Social Security Administration's (SSA) publicly available resources, including the disability determination process website, the Program Operations Manual System (POMS), and the Social Security Handbook.

The disability process begins when a person files an application for disability benefits with SSA. The SSA field office determines if the applicant meets the non-disability criteria (i.e., age, work credits), and, if so, the application with any medical information provided is forwarded to the Disability Determination Service (DDS) in the state of jurisdiction. DDSs are state agencies; in South Carolina, SC DDS is housed within the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD).

Case development is a joint effort between the claimant, the claimant's representative (if applicable), the SSA field office, the state DDS, and federal disability determination offices (when applicable). The DDS must:

- Review all case documentation.
- Recognize and act to resolve questions and discrepancies in work activity.
- Obtain relevant evidence from prior case(s).
- Request medical and other necessary information to adjudicate the claim.
- Make required effort to get needed evidence.
- Take additional action to resolve insufficiencies and inconsistencies.
- Document all efforts to obtain evidence.

INITIAL DISABILITY CLAIMS – A state DDS is responsible for developing (evaluating) medical evidence and making initial disability determinations on whether a claimant is disabled under the Social Security Act.

An adult is considered disabled under Social Security rules if he or she has a medically-determinable physical or mental impairment (or both) that prevents the individual from doing any substantial gainful activity, and the impairment has lasted or is expected to last for a continuous period of at least 12 months, or the impairment is expected to result in death. For children, the criteria are whether the impairment causes marked and severe functional limitations and has lasted or is expected to last for a continuous period of at least 12 months, or expected to result in death.

The DDS considers all relevant evidence (anything submitted to or obtained by SSA/DDS related to the claim) for the claim from multiple sources, including available prior evidence, medical sources, and nonmedical sources, including the claimant. The developed evidence should be complete and detailed enough to permit an independent determination about whether the claimant is disabled.

The DDS tries to obtain evidence from the claimant's own medical sources first; however, if it is unavailable or insufficient to make a determination, a consultative exam will be arranged to obtain the necessary additional information. A consultative exam conducted by the claimant's medical team is preferred but may be conducted by an independent source. Every disability determination must contain a medical assessment unless the case contains no medical evidence. A disability examiner may assist with completing the medical assessment, but only a medical or psychological consultant may sign the assessment.

After completing development of the evidence, the DDS makes the initial disability determination. Then, the DDS returns the case to the SSA field office for appropriate action, which, if the claimant is determined to be disabled, includes computing the benefit amount and beginning payments.

RECONSIDERATIONS – A reconsideration is the first step in the administrative review process the SSA provides to a claimant dissatisfied with an initial medical determination. The reconsideration is handled similarly to the initial claim. It involves a new, thorough, independent review of all evidence from the initial determination and any new evidence submitted or obtained by SSA in connection with the request. The request must be in writing. The disability examiner, medical consultant, and psychological consultant must be different from the adjudicative team that made the initial determination.

APPEALS – Claimants who are dissatisfied with their reconsideration determinations may request an appeals hearing before an administrative law judge within SSA's Office of Hearing Operations. A claimant may submit additional information and evidence to the judge, who will issue a decision based on all evidence of record, including evidence obtained at the hearing.

CONTINUING DISABILITY REVIEWS – To ensure individuals receiving disability benefits still meet the legal requirements, continuing disability reviews are conducted. All disability beneficiaries must be reviewed at least once every three years, or on an SSA-prescribed schedule based on the likelihood of medical improvement for permanently disabled individuals. During the review, every reasonable effort is made to establish a 12-month medical history and obtain current information about the claimant's impairment(s) and any work activity.

If it is determined that the individual is no longer disabled, benefits are suspended or terminated. The individual is given the opportunity to appeal the cessation and request the benefits continue during the appeal process until a final decision is rendered.

Human Resources' Impact on Processing Time

We reviewed SC DDS' human resources function to determine the impact of human resources issues on claim processing in South Carolina. We found:

- Because SSA must grant hiring authority, SC DDS has minimal control over hiring DDS employees.
- SSA does not grant hiring authority consistently or offer flexibility to replace staffing losses as needed.
- SC DDS' disability determination examiner salaries are not comparable with salaries for similar positions within SSA.
- From January 2021 to June 2026, SC DDS experienced a net reduction of 35% of its total disability determination examiners.
- SC DDS lost a total of 16 examiners with more than 15 years' experience, 12 of whom had over 20 years' experience.
- The lack of a telecommuting policy hinders SC DDS recruitment and retention.

SC DDS' loss of employees since 2021 has likely contributed to extended claim processing times. These claim processing delays are further exacerbated by SC DDS' inability to backfill positions as needed, inconsistent approval of hiring authority by SSA, low salaries, and the two-year training period needed for new disability examiners to be self-sufficient. The absence of hiring authority is a significant barrier to improving processing times.

Social Security Administration Hiring Authority

SC DDS cannot hire employees without being granted hiring authority from SSA. We reviewed the SSA Program Operations Manual System (POMS), which requires states to provide sufficient qualified personnel and adhere to state approved personnel standards in selection, tenure, and compensation of employees. However, no definition for "sufficient" or "qualified" is provided.

The state is additionally responsible for establishing positions, recruitment, selection and tenure, compensation, and staff development policies. For South Carolina, this means that SCVRD recruits, posts, and hires new SC DDS employees. While the state has these responsibilities, SCVRD has minimal control in when it can actually hire new SC DDS employees. SCVRD can only post available positions when SSA grants SC DDS hiring authority.

We also reviewed hiring authority granted to SC DDS from FFY 2021 to June 2026. We found hiring authority, both the frequency and number of positions, is not granted consistently. Chart 2.1 shows when hiring authority was granted, how many DDS positions were authorized, how many positions were filled, and how many of those filled positions were for disability determination examiners.

Chart 2.1: Social Security Administration Hiring Authority, FFY 2021 to June 2026

FFY	Date Granted	Number of Hires Authorized	Number of Positions Filled	Number of Examiner Positions Filled
2021	8/4/2020	46	24	13
2022	9/14/2021	29	27	17
2023	9/7/2023	63	36	23
2024	3/28/2024	24	24	13
2025	10/18/2024	12	9	7
2026*	2/12/2026, 2/26/2026, 3/16/2026, 4/13/2026	16	3 + *[13] in progress*	1 + *[13] in progress*

*As of June 29, 2026.

Source: LAC analysis of SCVRD DDS data.

The SSA POMS also indicates that evaluation of DDS operations is necessary to determine if improvement can be made to comply with SSA standards. This evaluation must also determine whether failure to meet the standards may be due to staffing. However, the SSA POMS does not include guidance on what to do in the event the failure is due to staffing.

Additionally, SSA does not consider disability determination examiners to be a critical hire position. A critical hire position is someone integral to the operation of the DDS program; "Without the position, there could be significant delays in services provided to our claimants." It is unclear how the frontline workers are not integral to the operation of the program, but this classification is out of SC DDS' control.

In interviews with SC DDS leadership, we were told:

- There is inadequate staffing to meet the needs to address the backlog of cases.
- SC DDS is losing the knowledge of employees who retire and cannot be replaced with the same caliber of examiner.
- Appropriate hiring authority from SSA would "drastically" help with the delay in processing times.

Other States

SSA did not allow us to review hiring practices at other state DDSs; as a result, we cannot compare them with South Carolina. We directly contacted DDS offices for all states included in the SSA Atlanta Region to request comparable data. Along with South Carolina, the SSA Atlanta Region includes Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Five states responded that the request should be submitted through SSA's FOIA process, and one state responded that the request could be answered by SSA. After our contact with the other states, a representative from the SSA Atlanta Region informed us that we would need to submit separate FOIA requests to SSA, instead of speaking with the states. At the time of drafting this report (September 22, 2026), we had not received final responses from SSA for any of our FOIA requests.

Additionally, we reviewed a July 2025 audit report by the SSA Office of Inspector General (OIG), titled *Staffing, Productivity, and Processing Times at State Disability Determination Services*. The objective of the report was to determine the extent to which staffing, productivity, and processing times at DDS changed from FFY 2019 through FFY 2023. While the audit report is not state specific to South Carolina, it does provide insight into other states' DDS staffing issues nationwide.

The SSA OIG found that from FFYs 2019 through FFY 2023, DDSs lost key technical staff, including disability examiners who made disability determinations. Nationally, the attrition rate of DDS full-time disability examiners for each FFY ranged from 13% to 25%, with an average of 19%. DDS staff losses coincided with a 15% reduction in disability determinations and an 81% increase in processing time.

The report noted that if a DDS loses an employee but does not have hiring authority, SSA typically does not authorize the DDS to replace the employee until it grants the next hiring authority. The report also states some DDSs have identified ideal staffing levels that would enable them to reduce pending claims to a manageable level, but DDSs cannot achieve those staffing levels because of the inconsistent hiring authority and inability to replace staff who separate.

The SSA OIG report recommended SSA create procedures that give DDSs the flexibility to replace staffing losses as needed throughout the year. While SSA agreed with this recommendation, our audit work did not find any notable changes in how hiring authority is granted to state DDSs.

Disability Determination Examiner Salaries

We reviewed the salaries of disability determination examiners at SC DDS from January 2021 to June 2026. The average salaries for each of the four examiner levels have increased at a similar pace over the years, between 23% and 28%. Chart 2.2 shows the average, maximum, and minimum salaries for each examiner level, for CY 2021 and CY 2026.

Chart 2.2: Disability Determination Examiner Salaries, by Level, 2021 and 2026

	Average			Maximum			Minimum		
Examiner Level	2021	2026	Percentage Increase	2021	2026	Percentage Increase	2021	2026	Percentage Increase
Examiner I	$41,426	$51,915	25%	$52,335	$62,569	20%	$36,417	$44,629	23%
Examiner II	$47,208	$60,295	28%	$55,554	$71,906	29%	$40,058	$51,048	27%
Examiner III	$53,436	$65,738	23%	$66,101	$77,182	17%	$45,386	$57,440	27%
Examiner IV	$59,119	$73,875	25%	$64,323	$80,114	25%	$54,083	$68,053	26%

Source: LAC analysis of Division of State Human Resources (DSHR) data.

The 2025 SSA OIG report noted the wages for disability examiners are not competitive with federal agencies or private corporations. Our review concurred with the SSA OIG report: an SC DDS Examiner III has a pay range of $52,100–$88,600 as opposed to an SSA comparable position with a pay range of $89,508–$116,362.

As previously mentioned, to compare SC DDS to its equivalents in the SSA Atlanta Region, we submitted an individual FOIA request for each of the seven states requesting salary information for each disability examiner level. However, at the time of drafting this report (September 22, 2026), we had not received any response(s).

While we did not receive requested information, we did compare SC DDS' pay band for Disability Determination Examiner Is to job postings in other Southeastern states for the comparable position. We found SC DDS' Examiner I pay band is consistent with its equivalents in the Southeast. Chart 2.3 shows the salaries for Examiner I comparable positions.

Chart 2.3: Disability Examiner I Salary Comparison, Southeastern States

State	Starting Salary
Alabama	$42,310
Florida	$45,760
Louisiana	$36,444 - $65,664
Mississippi	$35,797
North Carolina	$51,921
South Carolina	$39,300 - $66,800
Tennessee	$43,572 - $54,396

Note: Job postings for an Examiner I were unavailable for review for Georgia and Kentucky.

Source: LAC analysis.

Disability Determination Examiner Staffing Levels

From January 2021 to June 2026, SC DDS experienced a net reduction of 45 examiners—35% of total examiners. In that time, examiner levels I, II, and III all experienced similar levels of net reduction: 15, 17, and 13 examiners, respectively. The largest 12-month decrease occurred from January 2021 to January 2022, when DDS experienced a net reduction of 28 examiners—20% of total examiners. Chart 2.4 shows the total number of examiners in January of each calendar year.

Chart 2.4: Total Disability Determination Examiners, by Level, Each January, 2021 to 2026

Examiner Level	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
EXAMINER I	49	36	34	47	51	43
EXAMINER II	38	30	25	25	24	19
EXAMINER III	39	32	32	29	27	26
EXAMINER IV	14	14	14	14	15	15
Total	**140**	**112**	**105**	**115**	**117**	**103**

Source: LAC analysis of DSHR data.

As previously stated, we submitted an individual FOIA request for each of the seven states in the SSA Atlanta Region requesting information regarding examiner staffing levels. However, at the time of drafting this report (September 22, 2026), we had not received any response(s).

We reviewed separation records for SC DDS disability determination examiners from January 2021 to June 2026. From January 2021 to June 2026, a total of 114 examiners separated from the agency. Of those, 86 examiners separated for "personal" reasons, the most common reason. More examiners separated from the agency in 2021 than the other years, with 41 examiners leaving—31 of whom claimed "personal" as the reason.

Chart 2.5 shows the breakdown of examiner level separations by calendar year.

Chart 2.5: Disability Determination Examiner Separations, by Level, January 2021 to June 2026

Examiner Level	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
EXAMINER I	22	13	5	10	10	6	66
EXAMINER II	12	5	4	1	2	2	26
EXAMINER III	6	4	3	1	3	2	19
EXAMINER IV	1			1		1	3
Total	**41**	**22**	**12**	**13**	**15**	**11**	**114**

Source: LAC analysis of DSHR data.

Most examiners (65 of 114) who separated were Examiner Is, the first level of disability determination examiner. Of the 65 Examiner Is who left, 45 separated within the first two years.

It takes up to two years of extensive training for a new examiner to be self-sufficient. During the hiring process, candidates take an analytical reasoning test. After onboarding, a new examiner's training consists of:

- Six months of in-classroom training, including extensive medical training (i.e., neurological, respiratory, endocrine, and cardiac systems, cancers, and congenital conditions).
- Six months of hands-on training.
- One year of progressive training.

Each new examiner must pass a comprehensive, 200-question final exam, as well as quizzes at various intervals during training. New examiners do not receive cases right away, and when they do begin to receive cases, every case is fully reviewed by his or her supervisor.

From January 2021 to June 2026, SC DDS lost a total of 16 examiners across all levels with more than 15 years' experience, 12 of whom had over 20 years' experience. The 2025 SSA OIG report noted the complexity of the disability examiner position makes losing experienced staff detrimental to a DDS, as it results in significant loss of institutional knowledge. This loss of knowledge also results in a reduction in the higher output usually associated with an experienced examiner.

Telecommuting

Throughout our audit work, we were told a major factor leading to employee turnover was restrictions on employee telecommuting. In September 2025, the Governor issued Executive Order 2025-31 directing the Division of State Human Resources (DSHR) to implement an updated and revised telecommuting and remote work policy for state employees. The policy was last updated in April 2026 and requires state agencies to have a policy and plan approved by DSHR limiting telecommuting to two, non-consecutive days connected to a weekend.

We reviewed SCVRD's telecommuting policy, which was effective on October 1, 2025, and found the policy only allows telecommuting by SC DDS medical positions. The policy states other SCVRD employees are not permitted to telecommute on a regular basis. The policy does not specify the number of days SC DDS medical positions are permitted to telecommute, but an exemption request was approved on October 31, 2025, by DSHR allowing current and future medical positions to telecommute five days a week. Disability determination examiners are not considered DDS medical positions and, therefore, are not permitted to telecommute.

The statewide telecommuting policy, mentioned previously, contains guidance for an agency's telecommuting plan which includes accounting for "the cost and benefits" of allowing telecommuting leading to "greater efficiencies and cost savings." The policy includes examples of possible savings which include lower overtime and staffing costs, lower training and recruitment costs from reduced turnover, and lower recruitment costs due to increased applicants. DSHR offers support to calculate recruitment cost savings, an offer SC DDS leadership could benefit from considering.

In an interview with SC DDS leadership, we were told the statewide telecommuting policy "really hurt DDS." Prior to the order, SC DDS was able to retain some employees with the hybrid option of working up to three days at home. We were told that with the new order, SC DDS was unable to explain savings to the state by each employee working from home because the savings are not recognized as dollars to the state, but savings in processing time. Without demonstrable cost savings, examiners lost the ability to telecommute.

SC DDS Conducted Survey

SC DDS conducted an employee satisfaction survey in March 2026. At that time, there were approximately 280 SC DDS employees, and 170 employees responded to the survey. While our audit focused primarily on disability determination examiners, this survey was sent to all DDS employees. As a result, examiner responses could not be filtered out. We were, however, able to determine that 83 respondents self-identified as examiners.

In our review of all survey responses, we found telecommuting was frequently mentioned by most respondents. For example:

- When ranking in order of most to least important of six workplace factors, telecommuting/alternate work schedule was ranked as the second most important.
- 109 SC DDS employees indicated more telecommuting flexibility would make them more likely to stay at SC DDS long-term.
- In the open-ended question, "What is the single most important change SC DDS leadership could make to improve your experience at work?" 44 of 142 respondents included the option to telecommute in their responses.

In a response to another open-ended question in the DDS employee satisfaction survey, one respondent noted "the fact that the email we received [about telecommuting] said that it would be too much work to even try [to maintain telecommuting capabilities] is very disheartening." The survey was anonymous so getting clarity on this comment is not possible.

LAC Survey of Examiners

We conducted our own employee satisfaction survey which we only sent to disability determination examiners. The survey was emailed to 92 examiners, and we received 81 complete responses, a response rate of 88%. In our survey of disability determination examiners, there were many responses related to telecommuting. Notably:

- 56 respondents (69%) believe lack of remote work options is a primary factor contributing to turnover amongst examiners.
- Of the 56 respondents who have considered looking for a new job in the past year, 36 (64%) said lack of remote work options was a motivating factor.
- In the open-ended question, "Is there anything else… you would like to share?" 17 of 56 examiners noted telecommuting should be reinstated.

Two specific comments include:

- "It is extremely unfair that medical consultants are still able to work remotely, yet examiners are not."
- Lack of remote work "is a major issue since the medical consultants (MC) is [*sic*] allowed to work from home when other employee's [*sic*] are not."

In interviews with DDS leadership, we were told multiple times that allowing all DDS staff to telecommute would help to retain current employees. We were also told with no ability to hire without SSA hiring authority, the only "hook" available to prevent employee attrition at the state level is telecommuting. Incentives to increase employee retention, like telecommuting, are needed at SC DDS. In response to our survey statement, "I have considered looking for a new job in the past year," 69% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed.

As discussed, in order to compare SC DDS to its equivalents in the SSA Atlanta Region, we submitted an individual FOIA request for each of the seven states requesting information regarding telecommuting policies for DDS employees. However, at the time of drafting this report (September 22, 2026), we had not received any response(s).

Disability Determination Examiner Job Postings

We reviewed job postings for examiner positions from CY 2021 to CY 2025. Over the five years, there were nine postings for examiner positions: six for entry-level Examiner I positions and three for Examiner III positions. The minimum qualification for an Examiner I was a bachelor's degree and two years of professional experience. The minimum qualification for an Examiner III was a bachelor's degree and six years of professional experience, three of which are preferred to be disability examiner experience. The minimum qualifications for the two levels of examiners did not change over the period reviewed.

We also reviewed a job posting for an Examiner I, which is a continuous posting that opened on May 8, 2026. The minimum qualification was reduced to a high school diploma and six years of professional experience; a bachelor's degree or an associate degree may be substituted on a one-for-one year basis for experience. The previously advertised minimum qualifications of a bachelor's degree and two years of professional experience are included in this current posting as the preferred qualifications.

In addition to reviewing SC DDS' postings for disability determination examiners, we reviewed postings for similar positions in other state DDSs. Specifically, we reviewed the Southeastern states in the SSA Atlanta Region. The only state in the SSA Atlanta Region we did not review was Georgia, as no postings were available for review. To replace Georgia in our analysis, we also reviewed Louisiana's postings. Disability examiner positions in the southeastern states have similar requirements of a bachelor's degree or relevant experience.

SC DDS' disability determination examiners are not eligible to telecommute currently. In our review of other state job postings, not all states advertised whether the position was in-office or telecommuting eligible. However, we did note two states, North Carolina and Tennessee, whose postings specifically indicate that the position is telecommuting eligible or remote.

In addition to disability determination examiner postings in other states, we reviewed a federal Disability Processing Specialist position with SSA. This position is equivalent to a Disability Determination Examiner III at SC DDS. The SSA position is not virtual but may be eligible for telecommuting. The posting advertised a salary of $89,508–$116,362, which is significantly higher than SC DDS' pay range of $52,100–$88,600 for its Examiner III position.

Recommendations

1. The S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department should quantify the cost savings of offering telecommuting opportunities to all Disability Determination Services' employees.

2. If there are notable cost savings, the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department should allow Disability Determination Services' employees to telecommute.

Inaccessible Processing Time Data

The cause of prolonged wait times for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) claim determinations remains unknown. We submitted multiple requests for processing time data to SC DDS, but we were denied information. SSA also denied our requests for necessary documentation, which prevented analysis of wait times by claim stage. Additionally, without access to the requested data, analysis of any claim backlogs could not be conducted.

On January 21, 2026, an initial request for information was provided to SCVRD. We requested any lists or databases of individuals awaiting determination, which could be identified by name and/or case number. We were told this request, as well as the rest of the information requested, required a review by the SSA's Office of General Counsel. On March 3, 2026, SC DDS leadership provided a response to this initial request that stated:

> SSA's disability determination data is protected by the Privacy Act of 1974, the Social Security Act, the Internal Revenue Code, and other laws, and SSA lacks authority to share information from these systems for the purpose of the audit described in the May 12, 2025 letter provided to SSA.

Subsequently, on May 26, 2026, another request was made to SC DDS seeking the number of claims submitted from CY 2021 to the present, along with deidentified state disability claimant data and associated progress reports.

On June 10, 2026, SC DDS leadership communicated SSA's response related to our request for claimant data was still pending. However, on June 17, 2026, SSA correspondence was provided denying the requests. The SSA denial for each requested item specifically stated:

> SSA's disability determination data is protected by the Privacy Act of 1974, the Social Security Act, the Internal Revenue Code, and other laws, and SSA lacks authority to share information from these systems for the purpose of the audit described in the May 26, 2026, letter provided to SSA.

We requested this data to identify the slowest parts of the disability determination process. In our survey of SC DDS disability examiners, medical evidence reviews and criteria checks were identified as the most time-consuming aspects of the process; however, we were unable to confirm this without the additional data. We also wanted to explore whether there were other common factors among claimants that contribute to slower processing times. For more information on scope impairments and data denials, refer to Chapter 1, *Introduction and Background*.

To try to mitigate the effects of the scope impairment, we searched for other sources of data. We reviewed SC DDS' disability determination examiner team statistics reports and publicly accessible SSA data. However, with only this information, evaluation of the stages in the SC DDS determination process to pinpoint specific causes of delays could not be completed. Additionally, because we were denied access to the source data for state disability claims, we were unable to verify the accuracy of SC DDS' disability examiner team statistics reports.

Review of Disability Determination Examiner Team Statistics Reports

SC DDS Rolling Disability Examiner Team Statistics Reports

On June 10, 2026, SC DDS provided rolling disability examiner team statistics reports for CY 2021 through CY 2025, along with year-to-date (YTD) figures through April for CY 2026. The reports included rolling metrics on net receipts (applications), production, quality assurance, aged case percentages, consultative examinations, and processing times. Metrics provided were compiled by month. SSA sets disability examiner workload goals, which include the processing of claims in 90 days or less.

On June 17, 2026, we inquired with SC DDS about the availability of any supporting documentation for the rolling team statistics report that would clarify the totals presented. On June 19, 2026, SC DDS leadership informed us such documentation does not exist. We also asked whether the consolidated totals across all reports include SSDI, SSI, and concurrent claims. SC DDS leadership clarified that these totals represent the overall workload, including all case levels and types.

These reports were generated using MicroStrategy®, a system linked to the Disability Case Processing System utilized by SSA. According to SC DDS leadership, MicroStrategy generates large amounts of data, which SC DDS leadership then manually enters into the SC DDS rolling statistics reports. These statistics are used by SC DDS solely for internal monitoring purposes.

With the limited statistics shared, it appears SC DDS' calculations were performed by multiplying the monthly average processing times by monthly production figures, aggregating results across a 12-month period, and dividing by the 12-month rolling production figures. A comparison of the data revealed variances between the average numbers reported, raising questions about the methodology used for determining these averages. When asked why averages are determined this way, SC DDS leadership explained they must use broader calculations for their processing time statistics. Further, because some formulas and reports that provide this information are confidential, data is copied into charts to allow SC DDS to perform their calculations.

LAC Analysis of SC DDS Average Processing Times

Each SC DDS regional office is made up of five to seven disability examiner teams, depending on staffing levels. The reports provided by SC DDS include individual disability examiner statistics rolled up by team. To calculate the overall average number of processing days per year for each regional office and SC DDS, as a whole, we re-averaged the team figures. These calculated averages indicate that SC DDS consistently meets its processing time goal of 90 days or less. However, it is important to note that this timeframe begins once a case is assigned to a disability examiner and ends at the determination stage. This reporting does not include the wait times associated with the initial transfer of the claim from SSA to SC DDS, nor the time that elapses after a favorable determination until benefits are disbursed to claimants. As a result, the data does not represent the wait time a claimant actually experiences.

Chart 2.6 displays the overall average number of days per year for each regional office and SC DDS overall.

Chart 2.6: SC DDS Disability Examiner Team 12-Month Average Processing Time (Days)

	Calendar Year					
Regional Office	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**	**5-Year Average**
Columbia	78	81	76	61	70	73
Charleston	73	72	70	60	73	69
Greenville	75	76	71	65	69	71
SC DDS Overall	75	77	73	62	70	71

Source: LAC analysis of SC DDS 12-Month Rolling Disability Examiner Team Statistics reports.

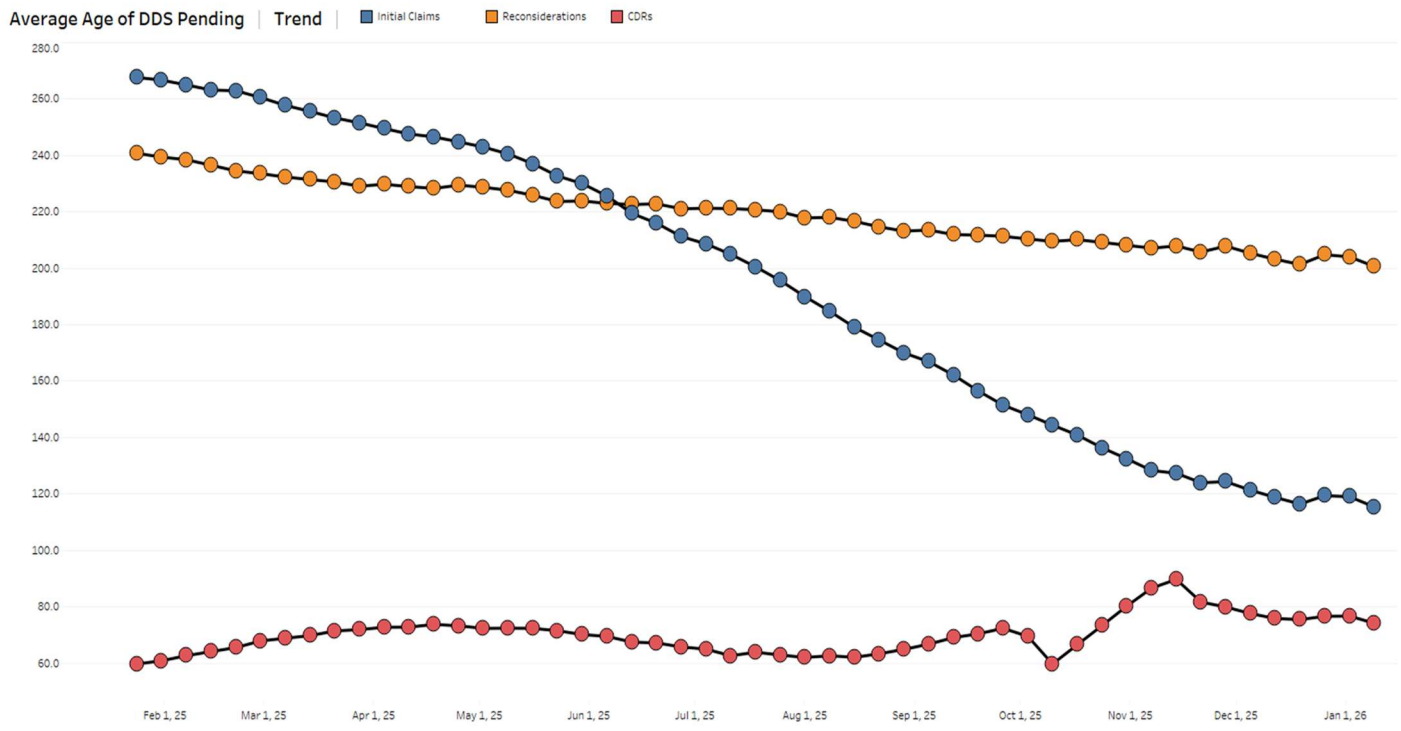
While SC DDS appears to meet internal processing time targets, the absence of comprehensive documentation to support this reporting raises concerns regarding data accuracy. Improved transparency and data reliability is needed to enhance the integrity and usefulness of performance metrics for stakeholders.

We were told by SCVRD leadership that they do not receive any reports with SC DDS' processing times. On July 17, 2026, we made a final request to SC DDS for any annual reports submitted to SCVRD that may include case processing information. SC DDS leadership provided links to publicly available SSA data. However, we were previously informed, by the same member of SC DDS leadership, that a direct comparison between SC DDS reporting and SSA data is not possible.

In response to our preliminary draft, SC DDS noted that there is not a report regarding processing time submitted to SCVRD leadership on a regular basis. Performance data is only provided during monthly executive staff meetings, reported out by the DDS director.

SC DDS reports the average age of SC DDS pending claims has decreased between February 2025 and January 2026. However, because we were denied access to claimant and additional data, we could not perform our own analysis, and we cannot verify this claim. Chart 2.7 was provided by SC DDS and is not the result of LAC analysis.

Chart 2.7: Average Age of SC DDS Pending Claims



	Feb 2025	Jan 2026
Initial	268 days	116 days
Reconsideration	241 days	201 days
CDR	60 days	74 days

Source: SC DDS.

Overview of Social Security Administration Data

SSA datasets vary in reported information, including differences in the types of reporting years (calendar year versus fiscal year) and the timing of the most recent updates. Documentation from SSA acknowledges workload counts presented in its publications may not align with other SSA data sources. Therefore, none of the data can be directly compared.

It is also important to note this data reflects the state in which the agency making the determination is located, rather than the residency of the claimant. SSA data, including processing times, is available at the national level and cannot be broken down by state. However, workload counts specific to South Carolina are detailed in Charts 2.8, 2.9, and 2.10.

State Agency Monthly Workload Data

We reviewed the SSA State Agency Monthly Workload Data, which, at the time of review, was updated on April 15, 2026, to include data through March 2026. Monthly workload data is provided at the initial, reconsideration, and continuing disability review (CDR) level. Additionally, data is broken down for SSDI, SSI, and concurrent claims (filings for both SSDI and SSI). A search for processing time data yielded no relevant information.

Charts 2.8, 2.9, and 2.10 present data on South Carolina's disability receipts, determinations, and allowances from CY 2021 through March 2026, categorized by review level (initial, reconsideration, CDR) and program type (SSDI, SSI, concurrent). Key data relevant to our review includes:

- The number of claim receipts by program.
- The number of determinations made by program.
- The number of favorable determinations (allowances or continuations in the case of CDRs) by program.

To determine the total number of SSDI claims, both SSDI-only and concurrent claims data were combined. The same methodology was employed for SSI claims.

Chart 2.8: SC DDS Initial Claims, CY 2021 to March 2026

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026*
SC Initial Receipts						
All SSDI	35,204	27,169	27,575	26,931	25,257	6,798
All SSI	30,646	24,454	25,230	23,108	21,301	5,491
Concurrent Only	12,864	9,506	10,131	9,842	8,983	2,334
SC Initial Determinations						
All SSDI	20,491	16,479	20,763	22,193	28,644	5,888
All SSI	18,538	15,489	18,488	21,545	28,353	5,450
Concurrent Only	7,511	5,995	7,551	8,150	11,037	2,017
SC Initial Allowances						
All SSDI	7,904	7,113	8,461	8,594	9,848	2,204
All SSI	6,417	6,198	7,143	7,891	9,054	1,902
Concurrent Only	2,177	2,052	2,490	2,445	2,899	612

*Updated April 15, 2026 to include data through March 2026.

Source: LAC analysis of SSA State Agency Monthly Workload data.

Chart 2.9: SC DDS Reconsiderations, CY 2021 to March 2026

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026*
SC Reconsideration Receipts						
All SSDI	12,963	5,614	6,444	7,605	11,797	2,508
All SSI	9,879	4,437	4,689	5,423	8,512	1,805
Concurrent Only	5,525	2,340	2,612	3,048	4,901	949
SC Reconsideration Determinations						
All SSDI	6,187	4,976	5,934	5,549	8,350	3,735
All SSI	4,974	3,949	4,514	3,548	5,967	2,796
Concurrent Only	2,707	1,997	2,444	2,003	3,406	1,604
SC Reconsideration Allowances						
All SSDI	851	815	986	970	1,423	603
All SSI	633	578	687	574	814	339
Concurrent Only	339	267	353	320	437	192

*Updated April 15, 2026 to include data through March 2026.

Source: LAC analysis of SSA State Agency Monthly Workload data.

Chart 2.10: SC DDS Continuing Disability Reviews, CY 2021 to March 2026

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026*
SC Continuing Disability Review Receipts						
All SSDI	6,343	6,160	4,985	3,161	4,259	1,987
All SSI	11,967	8,963	7,104	5,530	5,209	2,376
Concurrent Only	810	762	567	357	477	210
SC Continuing Disability Review Determinations						
All SSDI	3,794	5,096	4,309	3,227	3,571	1,387
All SSI	6,939	8,044	6,058	5,105	4,621	1,584
Concurrent Only	478	639	495	341	404	143
SC Continuing Disability Review Continuations						
All SSDI	3,305	4,400	3,709	2,806	3,063	1,243
All SSI	5,104	6,091	4,430	3,796	3,204	1,195
Concurrent Only	409	532	407	288	339	127

*Updated April 15, 2026 to include data through March 2026.

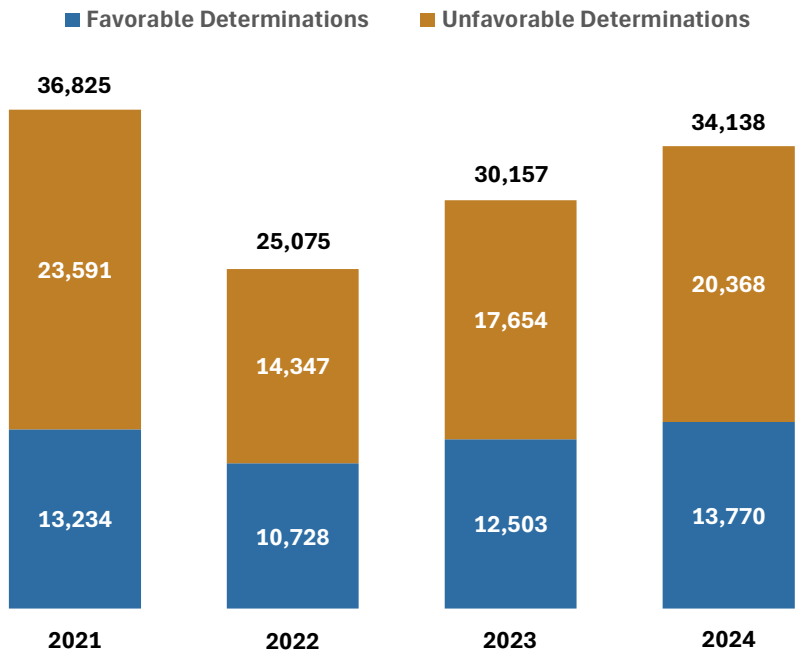
Source: LAC analysis of SSA State Agency Monthly Workload data.

FFY Disability Claim Data

We reviewed the SSA [Federal] Fiscal Year Disability Claim Data, which, at the time of review, was last updated on February 18, 2026 to include data through FFY 2024. This data includes information about SSA's processing of initial claims for disability benefits, detailing the number of receipts, determinations, and allowances by each state. A search for processing time information did not yield relevant information.

Chart 2.11 breaks down the number of favorable and unfavorable initial disability claim determinations for South Carolina from FFY 2021 to FFY 2024. It is important to note that information on reconsiderations and CDRs was not included with this data.

Chart 2.11: SC DDS Favorable Versus Unfavorable Initial Determinations, FFY 2021 through FFY 2024



*Updated February 18, 2026 to include FFY 2024.

Source: LAC analysis of SSA FFY disability claim data.

As noted, reviewed SSA data does not contain details regarding processing times for disability claims. Instead, it presents aggregated counts classified by state and year.

Removal of Performance Metrics from SSA Website

During our review of SSA information, we found a congressional letter addressed to the SSA Commissioner dated July 14, 2025. The letter expressed concerns regarding the removal of essential customer service and performance metrics from the agency's website. It specifically identified the removal of key statistics, such as the processing times for disability claims, the reconsideration times for disability decisions, and the processing times for disability hearings. As of June 10, 2026, many of the removed metrics had still not been restored.

Recommendation

3. South Carolina Disability Determination Services should send monthly performance data reports, including the number of cases awaiting assignment and case processing time metrics, to S. C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department leadership.

Strategies to Reduce Processing Time

We reviewed efforts by SC DDS to reduce the state's backlog and decrease case processing time. We found:

- SC DDS offers Temporary Salary Adjustments (TSAs) to incentivize staff to take on an increased caseload; however, disability examiner feedback indicates that most already handle significant caseloads, leading to questions about the effectiveness of the incentive.
- SC DDS outsources cases using associated user functionality within the processing system and this allows disability examiners from other states to adjudicate without transferring cases. Data accessibility remains an issue for evaluating the effectiveness of these efforts.
- According to feedback from SC DDS disability examiners, the review of medical evidence is the most time-consuming aspect of the determination process.
- Feedback from disability examiners also identified factors, such as disability examiner caseload and applicant cooperation, that most significantly influence the length of time in case determinations.

Lack of accessible case processing data and comparative information hindered our development of clear and actionable strategies to address SC DDS' existing challenges or assess the effectiveness of its current initiatives. Additional data is needed to determine the impact of existing SC DDS' initiatives on case management and processing time efficiency.

SC DDS' Current Strategies

TSA Initiative

SC DDS offers TSAs to incentivize disability examiners to increase their caseloads. Data regarding TSAs was sourced from the Division of State Human Resources including the period spanning April 2, 2026 to July 1, 2026, the latest quarter available for review.

- A total of 51 SC DDS employees participated in the TSA initiative during this period.
- Of these participants, 24 were classified as [disability determination] Examiner(s) I, II, III, or IV.
- Salary adjustments among SC DDS employees ranged from 2% to 15%. The majority (44 out of 51) received a 2% increase.
- Specifically for Examiners I through IV, salary adjustments were between 2% and 12.24%, with most disability examiners (19 out of 24) receiving a 2% increase.

Criteria used by SC DDS for determining the salary adjustment percentage for each disability examiner is unknown. An SCVRD official explained, "if you take more [claims], you get a larger salary adjustment." However, feedback received from disability examiners indicates most already receive between 11 to 16 new cases each week. In response to our survey, one disability examiner commented, "…an average examiner can effectively and timely [*sic*] complete their workload if they receive 12-14 cases a week. Only the best [disability examiners] can do 16 cases a week." This raises questions regarding whether the incentive structure is sufficient to motivate increased participation. Another disability examiner pointed out, "you don't get enough extra money to make it worth opting in to do TSA…"

SC DDS provided us with reports detailing rolling disability examiner team statistics that include TSA information. However, we were unable to access the necessary supporting documentation or SSA source data to verify the accuracy of the reporting. Currently, the effectiveness of TSAs in reducing the backlog of cases and increasing processing times remains unclear due to the absence of comparative data or supporting evidence (refer to Chapter 2, *Inaccessible Processing Time Data*).

In response to our preliminary draft, SC DDS stated that its TSA payments ranged from 5% to 15% but did not provide any supporting documentation. However, the data analyzed contained pre-tax salaries from the Division of State Human Resources. While the data does include some payments for 5% to 15%, our analysis shows the majority of TSAs were 2% increases.

Outsourcing of Cases to Other States

In March 2026, an SC DDS official told us that in 2025, the office was supported by five entities, including North Carolina's DDS and federal partners. SC DDS leadership explained these external entities would handle older cases. However, as of March 2026, SC DDS had cases from 2023 and 2024 "still waiting for a decision."

Another SC DDS official stated in July 2026 that the number of cases handled by other states had risen compared to previous years. States including North Carolina, Arkansas, and Alabama have sometimes taken on cases from South Carolina. It was pointed out that most state DDS offices utilize associated user functionality, which allows disability examiners from other states to review cases within the disability case processing system without needing a full case transfer. This allows cases to stay assigned to South Carolina while enabling a team in another state to carry out the determination.

We submitted a request to SC DDS for any relevant disability determination progress reports or documentation covering the period from CY 2021 to the present. This included efforts to reduce backlogs through outsourcing, as well as the involvement of other state DDS offices and SSA. Our request for this information was denied by SSA.

Inaccessible claim data makes it challenging to assess the effectiveness of assistance from other states' DDSs, federal SSA support, and outsourcing initiatives aimed at tackling the backlog of cases. For more details on scope impairments and data denials, refer to Chapter 1, *Introduction and Background*.

LAC Survey of SC DDS Disability Examiners

In June 2026, we distributed 92 surveys to disability examiners at SC DDS and received 81 completed responses—a response rate of 88% (refer to *Appendix A*). The survey included questions regarding the time-consuming stages of the determination process.

Time-Consuming Aspects of the Determination Process

When asked which part of the process took the most time, 47% of respondents pointed to the review of medical evidence and criteria checks. Consultative examinations were cited by 25% of disability examiners, and the remaining 28% of participants specified "other" factors, with comments highlighting delays in gathering medical, vocational, and claimant documentation, as well as delays waiting for reviews by other internal staff. One respondent noted that the time required depends on the specifics of each case.

Workload Impact

Regarding the impact of workload on the quality of determination decisions, a small number of respondents to our survey stated their workloads negatively affected their decisions, with only 2% indicating "always," while 11% said "often." The majority, 40%, reported that it was "rarely" an issue, while 20% felt it never impacted the quality of their work, and 27% said it sometimes affects the quality of their work.

When asked if they felt rushed to make decisions, 28% of respondents affirmed that they did, while 41% responded they did not, and the remaining 31% sometimes felt pressured.

Caseload Management

In terms of caseloads, more than half of the respondents (54%) indicated the majority of their work involved initial cases. In contrast, only a small fraction were reconsideration cases, and 25% were continuing disability review cases. Several other respondents noted they handled a mixed caseload.

Factors Influencing Case Determination Length

Respondents were asked to rank various factors that influence the length of case determinations. The number of cases a disability examiner manages emerged as the most significant factor, chosen by 31% of respondents. The applicant's cooperation in providing requested information ranked as the second most significant factor, identified by 28% of respondents.

Variability in Time for SSA to Send Applications

Regarding the timeliness of claimant applications submitted to SC DDS by the SSA Regional Office, only 4% of respondents indicated that they "strongly agreed" that applications were sent over in a timely manner. A majority of respondents (57%) expressed neutrality regarding the timeliness of the SSA Regional Office in providing applications to SC DDS.

When asked about the average duration for SC DDS to receive a claimant application, disability examiner responses varied significantly, with reported times ranging from 0 to 600 days, with an overall average of 86 days. This variability may be linked to the neutral responses concerning the SSA Regional Office's timeliness.

Additional Disability Examiner Feedback

In an open-ended question seeking additional feedback on disability determinations and related processes, the majority of respondents to our survey identified procedures, staffing, and pay as areas for potential improvement.

For more information on staffing and pay, refer to Chapter 2, *Human Resources' Impact on Processing Time*. For more information on policies and procedures, refer to Chapter 2, *SC DDS Structure and Leadership*.

Request for Information from Other States' DDSs

Between June 1, 2026 and June 5, 2026, we attempted to contact other DDS offices in states that fall within the same SSA administrative region as South Carolina. The states contacted in the Atlanta Region included Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Specifically, we sought information regarding disability determination examiners, recruitment and retention strategies, training requirements, processing times, backlog reduction strategies, and productivity benchmarks.

As discussed previously, we ultimately submitted individual FOIA requests for each state to SSA for the information at SSA's request on June 15, 2026. As of September 22, 2026, there have been no significant updates regarding the pending FOIA requests to SSA for information on other states' disability determination process. As a result, we were unable to review other states' best practices or strategies.

SC DDS Structure and Leadership

SC DDS operates under strict oversight by the federal government through SSA. We reviewed the SSA Program Operations Manual System (POMS), the Code of Federal Regulations, and surveyed SC DDS employees. We found:

- SC DDS may request assistance with case backlogs from SSA; however, availability of assistance is at the discretion of SSA and whether it has available resources.
- The disability determination process is subject to continuing changes from SSA, federal policy, and court decisions.
- When compared to other states, SC DDS is not uniquely structured or governed; however, SC DDS' website is less informative than some states.
- SC DDS disability examiners have a positive opinion of SC DDS leadership.

Assistance with Case Backlogs

Availability of assistance is at the discretion of SSA and whether resources are available. We reviewed the Code of Federal Regulations, the SSA POMS, and interviewed an SC DDS official. We found the following regulations are used by SSA to govern assistance to state DDS offices: 20 CFR §§416.1061-1062, §416.1044, §416.1050, and §416.1060.

When Assistance is Provided

20 CFR §416.1060 states how SSA will monitor state DDS offices. SSA regularly monitors the combined Title II (Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI), which includes SSDI) and Title XVI (SSI). It establishes initial performance accuracy benchmarks and monitors both Title II and Title XVI initial processing times individually. Monitoring is used to determine how SSA will provide assistance and to what extent that assistance will be provided.

20 CFR §416.1061 states that SSA will provide DDS optional or mandatory support when failure to meet specific benchmarks is observed during regular monitoring. Support may be provided based on available resources. The standards set by SSA require:

- DDS initial performance accuracy rate to not fall below 90.6% for both Title II and Title XVI.
- Processing time for Title II initial cases to not exceed 49.5 days.
- Processing time for Title XVI initial cases to not exceed 57.9 days.

SSA will provide support to a state DDS if, after monitoring, SSA determines that two of the three threshold levels are not met, with one being performance accuracy, for two consecutive calendar quarters. Similarly, SSA may impose mandatory performance support onto a state DDS if any one of the three threshold levels are not met for two consecutive calendar quarters.

Calculation of Processing Times

20 CFR §416.1044 establishes how SSA will calculate the processing times for state DDS offices to determine if the processing time standards are being met. SSA calculates the processing times for initial Title XVI cases by using the mean number of days, including non-business days (Saturday, Sunday, and holidays), from the day the case folder is received by the state DDS office until there is a systems input of a presumptive disability decision or until the case folder is released by the state agency, whichever is earlier. The regulation also states that SSA will calculate the processing time for initial Title II cases using the mean number of days, including non-business days (Saturday, Sunday, and holidays), from the day the case folder is received in the state DDS office until the case is released back to SSA.

How Assistance is Provided

SSA then uses 20 CFR §416.1062 to determine what form of support will be provided by SSA to state DDS offices. Assistance may include an onsite review of cases processed emphasizing adherence to SSA's written guidelines, a request to have administrative measures implemented, federal personnel could also perform onsite reviews, conduct training or perform other functions to improve performance, or could also provide fiscal aid for temporary hiring or overtime, among other things. Performance support may include any or all of the assistance previously stated.

20 CFR §416.1050 restates the guidelines for SSA to provide mandatory assistance to state DDS offices while including that a written notice will be sent to a state DDS office informing them of their underperformance. The code further states that assistance will be provided for a period of up to 12 months.

DDS-Requested Assistance

SSA policy DI 22505.020 details how a state DDS office may request assistance from the SSA field office or another state DDS with regards to gathering additional evidence, or with assistance contacting a claimant. Although this policy exists in the SSA POMS for state DDS offices to request assistance, the policy also states that requesting assistance from SSA field offices when contacting claimants should be rare.

SSA field offices are not required to provide any status updates until 30 days after the requested information cannot be obtained. The field offices are not encouraged to assist the DDS with obtaining information to contact a claimant that should have been included in the initial claims packet sent from the SSA field office when filing the disability claim. Allowing the field office up to 30 days to obtain the information before notifying the DDS office that the information is not available prolongs the total processing time for the disability claim which keeps the claimants from being able to receive their disability payments.

After speaking with SC DDS employees, we learned that they may and have received assistance from other state DDS offices with case processing through a process called associated user functionality. SC DDS may provide access to its case processing system to other state DDS disability examiners when the other state is assisting with case determinations. These other state disability examiners are put into the case processing system as guest disability examiners which allows the SC DDS to maintain jurisdiction of the case without having to file for a transfer. The data that is generated with the case is included in SC DDS' statistics, which include processing times, consultative examination rates, and other quality assurance metrics.

After reviewing the SSA POMS and regulations, there were no publicly available policies listed that discussed assistance through associated user functionality. Through further interviews with SC DDS employees, we found that there are also no official manuals or policies that address assistance through associated user functionality.

Overall

SSA has numerous policies to address assistance and to monitor state DDS offices' performance. Each state DDS office's performance reports are monitored closely and extensively by the SSA. With the numerous policies that are used to determine assistance, a state DDS should be able to receive assistance to address the backlog of cases. However, SSA's assistance is based on available resources and SSA's determination of need, which is at SSA's discretion.

With limited assistance, a state DDS office may be left to handle the backlog with their own resources, like adding extra claims to disability examiner workloads or assigning cases to employees not in a disability examiner role, but who have adjudication experience. While working on the backlog of cases, these disability examiners continue to be assigned new initial claims which, in turn, increases disability examiners' workloads.

Continuing Changes to the Process

We interviewed SC DDS employees and reviewed SSA's POMS and found SSA is consistently making changes to the policies governing the disability determination process.

On March 12, 2026, SSA announced processing of medical continuing disability reviews (CDRs) would be moved from state DDS' in-house to SSA's federal processing sites. For South Carolina, the closest site will be in Atlanta, Georgia. This site, called Disability Case Review, will be solely responsible for all medical CDRs. SSA indicated that by taking CDRs away from the state DDS offices, the DDS offices should be able to focus on processing initial and reconsideration cases, which should decrease the DDS' processing time. SSA further stated in its press release that the non-medical CDRs will be handled at the local SSA field offices, while the Disability Case Reviews will process the medical CDRs for the entire country.

After speaking with employees at SC DDS and reviewing the job listing for these sites, we learned that SSA is offering higher salaries and telecommuting opportunities for disability examiners who work in the federal processing sites. We interviewed SC DDS employees and learned, to their knowledge, SSA will not be taking all CDRs from state DDS offices, contrary to what was said in the press release.

Between June 1, 2026 and July 30, 2026, there have been 30 changes to the POMS alone. Current SSA regulations mandate extensive requirements as written before considering frequent changes made to the policies. We conducted a survey of SC DDS disability examiners (refer to *Appendix A*). Our survey had a response rate of 88% (81 of 92 disability examiners). We asked respondents to our survey whether they felt SSA's policies and regulations were clear. Respondents indicated the following in Chart 2.12.

Chart 2.12: LAC Survey Question on Clarity of SSA Policies

How clear are current Social Security Administration policies and regulations for making determinations?

	RESPONSES	
Not at all clear	1.23%	1
Somewhat unclear	16.05%	13
Neither clear nor unclear	7.41%	6
Somewhat clear	59.26%	48
Extremely clear	16.05%	13
	Answered	81

Source: LAC survey of SC DDS disability examiners.

With the numerous policies and codes that are constantly being added to and changed, the disability determination process is made more complicated, potentially prolonging disability determinations. State DDS offices may also lose seasoned disability examiners to the new positions created to handle CDRs. Losing disability examiners may increase the processing time for initial and reconsideration cases, prolonging the amount of time it takes a claimant to receive his or her disability determination and subsequently the claimant's disability payments from SSA.

Additionally, disability examiners continue to work CDR cases even after SSA declared the cases will be taken up by its federal agency sites. As of July 30, 2026, SSA had not included new policies addressing the change in CDR processing into the POMS after the announcement in March.

Comparison with Other States

SC DDS is not uniquely structured when compared to other Southeastern states; however, SC DDS' website is less informative than other Southeastern states. We reviewed and compared the SC DDS website to other Southeastern state websites. The states reviewed were all other states in SSA's Atlanta Region: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Other State DDS' Structure

Like South Carolina, Georgia and Mississippi house their DDS office within a department dedicated to rehabilitation for disabled individuals. The Tennessee DDS is also housed within their Division of Rehabilitation; however, the Tennessee Division of Rehabilitation is included within the umbrella of the Tennessee Department of Human Services.

North Carolina's DDS is included within the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Florida similarly includes the Florida DDS within the Florida Department of Health. The DDS unit for Kentucky is found within their Education and Labor Cabinet. Kentucky legislators moved the Kentucky DDS to this cabinet in 2024. No information for the Alabama DDS office was available online.

Websites

SCVRD maintains an SC DDS webpage through its website; however, the webpage information is limited compared to other states in the Atlanta Region. Other Southeastern states, with the exception of Alabama, have a range of information available online including the name of the DDS director, leadership staff, organizational charts, DDS office location(s), and information about the disability determination process and definitions. SC DDS' webpage does not contain any of this information. Limited available information may cause confusion or distrust between government agencies and the public.

A website dedicated to SC DDS' program that provides claimants with necessary information such as program information, agency location, director information, and an agency organizational chart, could be more helpful to claimants. Further, information on the disability claims process, including how claims are processed from beginning to end and expected processing times for the different types of claims based on SC DDS' performance statistics may assist in creating realistic expectations for claimants. Transparency could boost public opinion about the agency and provide claimants with assurance that their cases are being handled as timely as possible within the current confines of federal codes and SSA policies.

SC DDS Employee Opinions on Division Leadership

SC DDS disability examiners have a positive opinion of SC DDS leadership. In our survey, SC DDS disability examiners reported the following regarding management:

- 81% of respondents felt they are usually or always supported when handling complex determination cases.
- 94% of respondents felt their supervisor is usually or always accessible.
- 65% of respondents felt they agree or strongly agree that they can ask for assistance when their caseloads become overwhelming.
- Some respondents noted in their open-ended answers that agency leadership's communication could be improved.

SC DDS leadership also conducted its own survey of SC DDS employees in March 2026. This survey included other positions beyond disability examiners. From this survey, SC DDS employees reported the following regarding SC DDS management:

- 21% of respondents (35 of 170) strongly agreed and 30% of respondents (51 of 170) agreed that leadership communicates well about decisions affecting their positions.
- 65% of respondents (111 of 170) felt that their working relationships with their direct supervisors are "excellent – very supportive and communicative" and 22% of respondents (37 of 170) felt their relationships are "good – generally positive with occasional challenges."
- 27% of respondents (45 of 168) who answered what would make them stay at SC DDS long term included improved communication from leadership.
- Many open-ended responses regarding the most important change SC DDS could make noted communication should be improved.

Although leadership received mostly positive responses, issues with communication were noted throughout the open-ended responses in both surveys. Open-ended responses also indicated that policy changes regarding telecommuting and pay are needed, as discussed in Chapter 2, *Human Resources' Impact on Processing Time*.

Recommendation

4. The S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department should work with South Carolina Disability Determination Services leadership to update the information available on the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department website to include processing time statistics, agency location, an organizational chart, director information, and a brief overview of the disability determination process.

LAC Disability Examiner Survey Results

LAC's survey of South Carolina Disability Determination Services (SC DDS) disability examiners was conducted between June 18, 2026 and July 1, 2026 using SurveyMonkey®. We sent a survey to all 92 currently-working SC DDS disability examiners regarding the disability determination process and SC DDS management. Our survey had a response rate of 88% (81 of 92). Three individuals began but did not complete the survey; their responses have been filtered out from the results. Respondents were informed that their responses would remain confidential; therefore, open-ended responses have been summarized and referenced throughout the report to preserve anonymity for those who participated.

The survey was designed using question logic to direct respondents to specific questions based on their responses. This resulted in some questions with lower response counts, as they only applied to a limited number of participants. Additionally, some questions allowed respondents to select multiple answers, which resulted in some questions having higher response counts than total unique respondents. Questions are provided below with response percentages and response counts.

1. Approximately how many new cases do you receive each week?		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Fewer than 5 cases	3.70%	3
5-10 cases	22.22%	18
11-16 cases	71.60%	58
More than 16 cases	2.47%	2
TOTAL		**81**

2. How helpful was your examiner training?		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Not at all helpful	0.00%	0
Somewhat helpful	9.88%	8
Neutral	6.17%	5
Very helpful	43.21%	35
Extremely helpful	40.74%	33
TOTAL		**81**

3. How clear are current Social Security Administration policies and regulations for making determinations?		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Not at all clear	1.23%	1
Somewhat unclear	16.05%	13
Neither clear nor unclear	7.41%	6
Somewhat clear	59.26%	48
Extremely clear	16.05%	13
TOTAL		**81**

4. In your opinion, what part of the determination process takes the most time?		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Review of medical evidence/criteria checks	46.91%	38
Consultative examinations	24.69%	20
Cost evaluation/reporting	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	28.40%	23
TOTAL		**81**

5. Does your workload have a negative impact on the quality of your determination decisions?		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Always	2.47%	2
Often	11.11%	9
Sometimes	27.16%	22
Rarely	39.51%	32
Never	19.75%	16
TOTAL		**81**

6. Do you feel rushed to decide cases?		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Yes	28.40%	23
No	40.74%	33
Sometimes	30.86%	25
TOTAL		**81**

7. The majority of cases in my case load are:		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Initial Cases	54.32%	44
Reconsideration Cases	4.94%	4
Continuing Disability Review Cases	24.69%	20
Other (please specify)	16.05%	13
TOTAL		**81**

8. Factors that influence the length of most case determinations include (please rank the following factors in order from most significant effect to least significant effect):						
FACTORS:	**RESPONSES**					
	Ranked From Most Significant to Least Significant Effect					
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Number of cases in caseload	30.86%	9.88%	11.11%	17.28%	19.75%	11.11%
	25	8	9	14	16	9
Timeliness of applicants to receive a consultative examination	20.99%	18.52%	20.99%	18.52%	11.11%	9.88%
	17	15	17	15	9	8
Applicant's cooperation with requests for information	20.99%	28.40%	22.22%	18.52%	8.64%	1.23%
	17	23	18	15	7	1
Timeliness to receive medical records	14.81%	18.52%	28.40%	16.05%	16.05%	6.17%
	12	15	23	13	13	5
Missing information/incomplete applications sent to DDS	11.11%	19.75%	11.11%	22.22%	22.22%	13.58%
	9	16	9	18	18	11
More than one medical condition listed per application	1.23%	4.94%	6.17%	7.41%	22.22%	58.02%
	1	4	5	6	18	47
TOTAL						**81**

9. How supported do you feel when handling complex determination cases?		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Always supported	45.68%	37
Usually supported	35.80%	29
Sometimes supported	17.28%	14
Rarely supported	1.23%	1
Never supported	0.00%	0
TOTAL		**81**

10. How accessible is your supervisor when needed?		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Always accessible	65.43%	53
Usually accessible	28.40%	23
Sometimes accessible	3.70%	3
Rarely accessible	2.47%	2
Never accessible	0.00%	0
TOTAL		**81**

11. Staffing levels in my office are adequate.		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Strongly agree	3.70%	3
Agree	18.52%	15
Neither agree nor disagree	20.99%	17
Disagree	33.33%	27
Strongly disagree	23.46%	19
TOTAL		**81**

12. Did the job listing description at the time you applied provide an accurate overview of the position for which you were hired?		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Yes	49.38%	40
No	22.22%	18
No opinion/Do not remember what the listing said	28.40%	23
TOTAL		**81**

13. What do you believe are the primary factors contributing to turnover among disability examiners? (Please select up to 2 options.)		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Dissatisfied with pay and benefits	77.78%	63
Work hours/overtime	2.47%	2
Too much time spent in training	0.00%	0
Lack of support from management	0.00%	0
High caseloads	23.46%	19
Lack of remote work options	69.14%	56
Loss of employee morale	9.88%	8
Other (please specify)	13.58%	11
TOTAL		**159**

14. I have considered looking for a new job in the past year.		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Strongly agree	34.57%	28
Agree	34.57%	28
Neither agree nor disagree	9.88%	8
Disagree	12.35%	10
Strongly disagree	8.64%	7
TOTAL		**81**

15. What factors have motivated you to look for a new job in the past year? (Please select up to 2 options.)		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Dissatisfied with pay and benefits	69.64%	39
Work hours/overtime	1.79%	1
Too much time spent in training	0.00%	0
Management	12.50%	7
High caseloads	17.86%	10
Lack of remote work options	64.29%	36
Loss of employee morale	8.93%	5
Other (please specify)	16.07%	9
TOTAL		**107**

16. When my caseload becomes overwhelming, I am able to ask for and receive help.		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Strongly agree	19.75%	16
Agree	45.68%	37
Neither agree nor disagree	12.35%	10
Disagree	12.35%	10
Strongly disagree	9.88%	8
TOTAL		**81**

17. The Social Security Administration Regional Office provides claimant applications to Disability Determination Services in a timely manner.		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Strongly agree	3.70%	3
Agree	20.99%	17
Neither agree nor disagree	56.79%	46
Disagree	11.11%	9
Strongly disagree	7.41%	6
TOTAL		**81**

18. Based on your experience, on average, how many days does it take Disability Determination Services to receive a claimant application from the Social Security Administration Regional Office? Please enter a whole number.					
RESPONSES					
0	10	30	60	100	150
0	10	30	60	100	180
0	15	30	60	100	180
0	15	30	90	100	180
0	20	30	90	120	182
0	25	30	90	120	200
0	30	40	90	120	260
0	30	45	90	120	365
0	30	50	90	120	365
1	30	50	90	120	500
2	30	50	100	120	600
7	30	50	100	125	
10	30	50	100	150	
10	30	60	100	150	
TOTAL					**81**

19. Senior management staff and/or my direct supervisor are open to employee suggestions for improving productivity and quality of services.		
ANSWER CHOICES	**RESPONSES**	
Strongly agree	14.81%	12
Agree	55.56%	45
Neither agree nor disagree	12.35%	10
Disagree	8.64%	7
Strongly disagree	8.64%	7
TOTAL		**81**

20. Is there anything else regarding disability determinations, processing times, caseloads, backlogs, SSA, or suggestions for improvement that you would like to share with us?	
ANSWER CHOICES	
Open-ended responses only	
TOTAL	**56**

Agency Comments

Appendix B
Agency Comments

Disability Determination Services

To: Jordan Kneece, Audit Manager, Legislative Audit Council (LAC)

From: Yvonne Young, Director, South Carolina Disability Determination Services (SC DDS)

Date: September 29, 2026

RE: Audit Report Final Draft Response

Ms. Kneece,

After reviewing the draft report for the LAC audit, please see the following responses to be included with the final draft when it is posted:

Page 33 of the report discusses the SC DDS Temporary Salary Adjustment (TSA) Initiative, which was implemented to help reduce the workload backlog for disability determination claims.

The salary-adjustment range reported—2% to 12.24%, with most disability examiners (19 of 24) receiving a 2% increase—does not align with SC DDS documentation obtained from the South Carolina Enterprise Information System (SCEIS) for the April through July 2026 period. The only salary ranges offered by the SC DDS for the TSA initiative is 5% to 15%, as indicated in the attached documentation we received from SCEIS.

When SC DDS inquired about the data provided by the Department of State Human Resources (DSHR) and used by the auditors for this analysis, the auditors were unable to discuss the underlying data details. SC DDS was also unable to obtain the specific data set used in the analysis directly from DSHR. Consequently, SC DDS cannot determine the source of, or explain, the discrepancies between the report's stated salary-adjustment figures and SC DDS records.

Accordingly, SC DDS can provide only its SCEIS documentation, which reflects the TSA salary-adjustment offers made to SC DDS employees and indicates a range of 5% to 15% during the referenced period.

Thank you,

Yvonne W. Young

Yvonne W. Young

Felicia W. Johnson, Commissioner, SC Vocational Rehabilitation Department ▪ Yvonne Young, DDS Director

Providing quality disability determination services to South Carolinians in a responsive, timely and cost-effective manner

State Office ▪ PO Box 60 ▪ West Columbia, South Carolina 29171 ▪ dds.scvrd.net
833-851-4947 (Toll free) ▪ 833-974-2354 (Fax)

Valid From	Valid to Date (from 0185)	Annual Salary	Total Compensation/with TSA	Percentage from 0185
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 85,660.00	$ 98,509.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 97,979.00	$ 112,675.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 93,764.00	$ 103,140.00	10.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 89,450.00	$ 93,922.00	5.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 75,031.00	$ 86,286.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 81,657.00	$ 93,905.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 68,888.00	$ 79,221.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 88,047.00	$ 101,254.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 88,047.00	$ 101,254.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 101,254.00	$ 116,442.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 88,047.00	$ 101,254.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 86,164.00	$ 99,089.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 88,047.00	$ 101,254.00	15.000
1/17/2026	4/16/2026	$ 41,367.00	$ 47,572.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 78,843.00	$ 90,669.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 85,657.00	$ 98,505.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 60,444.00	$ 69,510.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 80,114.00	$ 88,125.00	10.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 102,484.00	$ 117,856.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 82,836.00	$ 95,261.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 98,956.00	$ 113,799.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 99,422.00	$ 114,335.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 88,047.00	$ 92,449.00	5.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 60,147.00	$ 66,161.00	10.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 88,047.00	$ 101,254.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 70,916.00	$ 81,553.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 61,468.00	$ 67,614.00	10.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 78,011.00	$ 89,712.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 55,172.00	$ 63,447.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 80,153.00	$ 88,168.00	10.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 73,709.00	$ 81,079.00	10.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 65,630.00	$ 75,474.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 68,934.00	$ 74,104.00	7.500
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 72,268.00	$ 83,108.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 75,782.00	$ 83,360.00	10.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 78,575.00	$ 82,503.00	5.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 63,517.00	$ 73,044.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 95,094.00	$ 104,603.00	10.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 79,988.00	$ 91,986.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 59,625.00	$ 67,078.00	12.500
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 78,414.00	$ 90,176.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 57,414.00	$ 66,026.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 69,307.00	$ 76,237.00	10.000

4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 62,878.00	$ 72,309.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 58,621.00	$ 61,552.00	5.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 45,917.00	$ 48,212.00	5.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 55,004.00	$ 57,754.00	5.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 54,069.00	$ 56,772.00	5.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 50,013.00	$ 55,014.00	10.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 48,662.00	$ 55,961.00	15.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 163,960.00	$180.356.00	10.000
4/2/2026	7/1/2026	$ 178,837.00	$ 201,631.00	15.000
		$ 4,100,337.00	$ 4,432,178.00	

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