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would that effect outweigh the advancement of the public interest defined in paragraph (b) of this section? Which effect is primary?

(d) *Deciding between waiver and reduction.* If the disclosure passes both tests, we will normally waive fees. However, in some cases we may decide only to reduce the fees. For example, we may do this when disclosure of some but not all of the requested records passes the tests.

(e) *Procedure for requesting a waiver or reduction.* You must make your request for a waiver or reduction at the same time you make your request for records. You should explain why you believe a waiver or reduction is proper under the analysis in paragraphs (a) through (d) of this section. Only FOI Officers may make the decision whether to waive, or reduce, the fees. If we do not completely grant your request for a waiver or reduction, the denial letter will designate a review official. You may appeal the denial to that official. In your appeal letter, you should discuss whatever reasons are given in our denial letter. The process prescribed in § 402.190 of this part will also apply to these appeals.

§ 402.190 Officials who may deny a request for records under FOIA.

Only the Deputy Executive Director for the Office of Public Disclosure, Office of the General Counsel, SSA, or her or his designee is authorized to deny a written request to obtain, inspect, or copy any social security record.

[62 FR 4154, Jan. 29, 1997, as amended at 68 FR 60295, Oct. 22, 2003]

§ 402.195 How a request is denied.

(a) *Oral requests.* If we cannot comply with your oral request because the Deputy Executive Director for the Office of Public Disclosure, Office of the General Counsel (or designee) has not previously made a determination to release the record you want, we will tell you that fact. If you still wish to pursue your request, you must put your request in writing.

(b) *Written requests.* If you make a written request and the information or record you requested will not be released, we will send you an official de-

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nal in writing. We will explain why the request was denied (for example, the reasons why the requested document is subject to one or more clearly described exemptions), will include the name and title or position of the person who made the decision, and what your appeal rights are.

(c) *Unproductive searches.* We make a diligent search for records to satisfy your request. Nevertheless, we may not be able always to find the records you want using the information you provided, or they may not exist. If we advise you that we have been unable to find the records despite a diligent search, this does not constitute a denial of your request.

[62 FR 4154, Jan. 29, 1997, as amended at 68 FR 60295, Oct. 22, 2003]

§ 402.200 How to appeal a decision denying all or part of a request.

(a) *How to appeal.* If all or part of your written request was denied, you may request that the Commissioner of Social Security, 6401 Security Boulevard, Baltimore, MD 21235 review that determination. Your request for review:

(1) Must be in writing;

(2) Must be mailed within 30 days after you received notification that all or part of your request was denied or, if later, 30 days after you received materials in partial compliance with your request; and

(3) May include additional information or evidence to support your request.

(b) *How the review is made.* After reviewing the prior decision and after considering anything else you have submitted, the Commissioner or his or her designee will affirm or revise all or part of the prior decision. The Commissioner (or a designee) will affirm a denial only after consulting with the appropriate SSA official(s), including legal counsel. The decision must be made within 20 working days after your appeal is received. The Commissioner or a designee may extend this time limit up to 10 additional working days if one of the situations in § 402.140(a) exists, provided that, if a prior extension was used to process this request, the sum of the extensions may not exceed 10 working days. You

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will be notified in writing of any extension, the reason for the extension, and the date by which your appeal will be decided.

(c) *How you are notified of the Commissioner's decision.* The Commissioner or a designee will send you a written notice of the decision explaining the basis of the decision (for example, the reasons why an exemption applies) which will include the name and title or position of the person who made the decision. The notice will tell you that if any part of your request remains unsatisfied, you have the right to seek court review.

§ 402.205 U.S. District Court action.

If the Commissioner or a designee, upon review, affirms the denial of your request for records, in whole or in part, you may ask a U.S. District Court to review that denial. See 5 U.S.C. 552(a)(4)(B). If we fail to act on your request for a record or for review of a denial of such a request within the time limits in §402.140(a) or in §402.190(b), you may ask a U.S. District Court to treat this as if the Commissioner had denied your request.

PART 403—TESTIMONY BY EMPLOYEES AND THE PRODUCTION OF RECORDS AND INFORMATION IN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

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AUTHORITY: Secs. 702(a)(5) and 1106 of the Act, (42 U.S.C. 902(a)(5) and 1306); 5 U.S.C. 301; 31 U.S.C. 9701.

SOURCE: 66 FR 2809, Jan. 12, 2001, unless otherwise noted.

§ 403.100 When can an SSA employee testify or produce information or records in legal proceedings?

An SSA employee can testify concerning any function of SSA or any information or record created or acquired by SSA as a result of the discharge of its official duties in any legal proceeding covered by this part only with the prior authorization of the Commissioner. An SSA employee can provide records or other information in a legal proceeding covered by this part only to the extent that doing so is consistent with 20 CFR parts 401 and 402. A request for both testimony and records or other information is considered two separate requests—one for testimony and one for records or other information. SSA maintains a policy of strict impartiality with respect to private litigants and seeks to minimize the disruption of official duties.

§ 403.105 What is the relationship between this part and 20 CFR parts 401 and 402?

(a) *General.* Disclosure of SSA's records and information contained in those records is governed by the regulations at 20 CFR parts 401 and 402. SSA employees will not disclose records or information in any legal proceeding covered by this part except as permitted by 20 CFR parts 401 and 402.

(b) *Requests for information or records that do not include testimony.*

(1) If you do not request testimony, §§ 403.120–403.140 do not apply.

(2) If 20 CFR part 401 or 402 permits disclosure to you of any requested record or information, we will make every reasonable effort to provide the disclosable information or record to you on or before the date specified in your request.

(3) If neither 20 CFR part 401 nor 402 permits disclosure of information or a