

## Social Security Administration

## § 402.125

records, claim files, and other personal information SSA maintains.

[62 FR 4154, Jan. 29, 1997, as amended at 63 FR 35132, June 29, 1998]

### § 402.105 Exemption seven for withholding records: Law enforcement.

We are not required to disclose information or records that the government has compiled for law enforcement purposes. The records may apply to actual or potential violations of either criminal or civil laws or regulations. We can withhold these records only to the extent that releasing them would cause harm in at least one of the following situations:

(a) *Enforcement proceedings.* We may withhold information whose release could reasonably be expected to interfere with prospective or ongoing law enforcement proceedings. Investigations of fraud and mismanagement, employee misconduct, and civil rights violations may fall into this category. In certain cases—such as when a fraud investigation is likely—we may refuse to confirm or deny the existence of records that relate to the violations in order not to disclose that an investigation is in progress, or may be conducted.

(b) *Fair trial or impartial adjudication.* We may withhold records whose release would deprive a person of a fair trial or an impartial adjudication because of prejudicial publicity.

(c) *Personal privacy.* We are careful not to disclose information that could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. When a name surfaces in an investigation, that person is likely to be vulnerable to innuendo, rumor, harassment, and retaliation.

(d) *Confidential sources and information.* We may withhold records whose release could reasonably be expected to disclose the identity of a confidential source of information. A confidential source may be an individual; a State, local, or foreign government agency; or any private organization. The exemption applies whether the source provides information under an express promise of confidentiality or under circumstances from which such an assurance could be reasonably inferred. Also, where the record, or information

in it, has been compiled by a law enforcement authority conducting a criminal investigation, or by an agency conducting a lawful national security investigation, the exemption also protects all information supplied by a confidential source. Also protected from mandatory disclosure is any information which, if disclosed, could reasonably be expected to jeopardize the system of confidentiality that assures a flow of information from sources to investigatory agencies.

(e) *Techniques and procedures.* We may withhold records reflecting special techniques or procedures of investigation or prosecution, not otherwise generally known to the public. In some cases, it is not possible to describe even in general terms those techniques without disclosing the very material to be withheld. We may also withhold records whose release would disclose guidelines for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions if this disclosure could reasonably be expected to create a risk that someone could circumvent requirements of law or of regulation.

(f) *Life and physical safety.* We may withhold records whose disclosure could reasonably be expected to endanger the life or physical safety of any individual. This protection extends to threats and harassment as well as to physical violence.

[62 FR 4154, Jan. 29, 1997. Redesignated at 63 FR 35132, June 29, 1998]

### § 402.110 Exemptions eight and nine for withholding records: Records on financial institutions; records on wells.

Exemption eight permits us to withhold records about regulation or supervision of financial institutions. Exemption nine permits the withholding of geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells.

### § 402.125 Who may release a record.

Except as otherwise provided by regulation, only the Deputy Executive Director for the Office of Public Disclosure, Office of the General Counsel, SSA, or her or his designee may determine whether to release any record in

## § 402.130

SSA's control and possession. This official is SSA's Freedom of Information Officer. Sections 402.40, 402.55, and 402.60 list some of the materials which we have determined may be released.

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

### § 402.130 How to request a record.

You may request a record in person or by mail or by electronic telecommunications. To the extent practicable, and in the future, we will attempt to provide access for requests by telephone, fax, Internet, and e-mail. Any request should reasonably describe the record you want. If you have detailed information which would assist us in identifying that record, please submit it with your request. We may charge fees for some requests (§§ 402.145–402.175 explain our fees). You should identify the request as a Freedom of Information Act request and mark the outside of any envelope used to submit your request as a "Freedom of Information Request." The staff at any Social Security office can help you prepare this request.

[63 FR 35132, June 29, 1998]

### § 402.135 Where to send a request.

You may send your request for a record to: The Deputy Executive Director for the Office of Public Disclosure, Office of the General Counsel, Social Security Administration, 6401 Security Boulevard, Baltimore, Maryland 21235.

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

### § 402.140 How a request for a record is processed.

(a) In general, we will make a determination as to whether a requested record will be provided within 20 days (excepting Saturdays, Sundays, and legal public holidays) after receipt of a request by the appropriate official (see § 402.135). This 20-day period may be extended in unusual circumstances by written notice to you, explaining why we need additional time, and the extension may be for up to 10 additional working days when one or more of the following situations exist:

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(1) The office processing the request needs to locate and then obtain the record from another facility;

(2) We need to locate, obtain, and appropriately examine a large number of records which are requested in a single request; or

(3) The office processing the request needs to consult with another agency which has a substantial interest in the subject matter of the request. This consultation shall be conducted with all practicable speed.

(b) If we cannot process your request within 10 additional days, we will notify you and provide you an opportunity to limit the scope of the request so that it may be processed within the additional 10 days, or we will provide you with an opportunity to arrange with us an alternative time frame for processing the request, or for processing a modified request.

(c) *Multi-tracking procedures.* We will establish four tracks for handling requests and the track to which a request is assigned will depend on the nature of the request and the estimated processing time:

(1) Track 1—Requests that can be answered with readily available records or information. These are the fastest to process.

(2) Track 2—Requests where we need records or information from other offices throughout the Agency but we do not expect that the decision on disclosure will be as time consuming as for requests in Track 3.

(3) Track 3—Requests which require a decision or input from another office or agency and a considerable amount of time will be needed for that, or the request is complicated or involves a large number of records. Usually, these cases will take the longest to process.

(4) Track 4—Requests that will be expedited.

(d) We will provide for expedited access for requesters who show a "compelling need" for a speedy response. The EFOIA describes compelling need as when the failure to obtain the records on an expedited basis could reasonably be expected to pose "an imminent threat to the life or physical safety of an individual," or when the request is from a person primarily engaged in disseminating information