

MSS Message**Effective Date:** 06/01/2020**Identification****Number:** MSS20-038 DPS**Intended Audience:** All Sites**Originating Office:** MSST**Title:** Document Processing System (DPS) – System Problem and Resolution**Type:** MSS Messages**Program:** All Programs**Link To Reference:****SENSITIVE - NOT TO BE SHARED WITH THE PUBLIC**

This message advises you of a problem identified in the Document Processing System (DPS) and includes a resolution.

Problem:

DPS encountered a problem with the connection between DPS and the Special Notice Option (SNO) process that began on 03/11/2020. The connection problem caused SNO notices to fail while going through the SNO process to the print vendor.

Resolution:

Effective 06/01/2020, DPS will send batches of the unsent SNO notices to the SNO Print Vendor and will implement a fix for the connection between DPS and SNO process.

Note: Please apply good faith exceptions before taking any adverse actions specific to SNO notices prepared in DPS from 03/11/2020 to 05/29/2020.

If you have questions about the information in this message, please contact your regional office systems support staff or your processing center operations analysis staff.

MSS20-038 DPS - Document Processing System (DPS) – System Problem and Resolution - 06/01/2020

Link to this document:

(b) (7)(E)

MSS Message**Effective Date:** 01/07/2021

Identification Number: MSS21-001 OTH
Intended Audience: All Sites
Originating Office: MSST
Title: Special Notice Option (SNO) - Print Vendor Production Outage
Type: MSS Messages
Program: All Programs
Link To Reference: See **References** at the end of this MSS

This message notifies you of the Special Notice Option (SNO) print vendor production outage.

Background

On Friday, 12/18/2020, the print vendor responsible for producing and mailing Braille, Data CD, Audio CD, and some Large Print notices for T2, T16, and T18 records encountered an error, which resulted in the failure to mail an estimated 12,000 notices. The affected notices have a print date in the range of Friday, 12/18/2020 through Thursday, 12/31/2020. The print vendor began mailing the delayed SNO notices on Thursday, 12/31/2020 with an expected completion date of Thursday, 01/07/2021. The error did not affect standard print notices with the same date range.

Establish Good Cause for Appeals Due to Delayed Notification

For all SNO notices dated between Friday, 12/18/2020 and Thursday, 12/31/2020 that require a beneficiary's response, develop for good cause if appropriate. If an individual files an appeal after the appeal period, develop for and extend good cause if the reason for late filing is due to the delayed receipt of a notice caused by the production outage or mail delivery delays. Refer to [GN 03101.020](#) for more guidance on providing good cause.

In addition to this guidance, please refer to the following emergency messages when processing any follow up requests during COVID field office closures.

[EM-20040 REV](#) - Statutory Benefit Continuation (SBC) Requests during the COVID-19 National Public Health Emergency- Title II and Title XVI

[EM-20050](#) - The Goldberg Kelly Notice (GK Notice), Request for Reconsideration, and GK Payment Continuation during the COVID-19 Pandemic

[EM-20010 SEN REV 6](#) - Disaster Procedures – Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic – One Time Instruction

Notices With Closeout Language

As per [GN 00204.012B](#), good cause does not apply to protective filing. The closeout period does not begin until SSA sends the proper closeout notice; therefore, consider the protective filing period open until SSA mails the notice.

Please refer to [GN 00204.012A](#) to determine and document the correct protective filing date.

If you have questions about the information in this message, please contact your regional office systems support staff or your processing center operations analysis staff.

References

[GN 03101.020](#)

[EM-20040 REV](#)

[EM-20050](#)

[EM-20010 SEN REV 6](#)

[GN 00204.012B](#)

[GN 00204.012A](#)

MSS21-001 OTH - Special Notice Option (SNO) - Print Vendor Production Outage - 01/07/2021

Link to this document:

(b) (7)(E)

Effective Dates: 11/18/2017 - Present (Go to [History](#))

SENSITIVE - NOT TO BE SHARED WITH THE PUBLIC

TN 40 (02-18)

TC 00101.024 Handling requests for standard and non-standard accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

A. Background

Effective February 4, 2014, we implemented the new 504 standard and non-standard accommodation process in selected field offices (FOs) and hearing offices (HOs). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities and requires Federal agencies and organizations that receive Federal financial assistance to provide meaningful access to their programs and activities to individuals with disabilities. The Code of Federal Regulations, 45 part 85, defines qualified individuals with a disability as “persons with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.”

In addition, effective July 28, 2014, the agency is implementing iAccommodate. iAccommodate is an application used to record and report accommodation requests, including standard special notice options (SNO) and, when applicable, refer non-standard accommodation requests to the Center for Section 504 Compliance.

Members of the public with disabilities may request accommodations that will enable them to participate in or receive the benefits for our programs and services. We presume that individuals with disabilities are capable of doing business with the Social Security Administration (SSA) without an accommodation unless they make a request. We cannot presume that a person needs an accommodation based solely on his or her diagnosis. When a member of the public has a disability that prevents or limits his or her ability to participate in an agency program or activity and informs us that he or she requires an accommodation that will enable participation in a program for which he or she is otherwise qualified, we will make every effort to meet that need.

B. Types of Accommodations

We provide two types of accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities:

1. Standard Accommodations

A standard accommodation is one we routinely provide upon request to a disabled individual who needs to do business with us. Standard accommodations do not require special handling (in FOs and HOs) or approval by a member of management. We provide these accommodations in all SSA offices, although some requests may require advance notice.

Types of standard accommodations include:

-

Certified and Qualified Sign Language Interpreter;

- Certified and Qualified Video Remote Sign Language Interpreter;
- Handwritten notes;
- Lip reading or speech reading;

NOTE: Individuals who are blind or visually impaired may also request notices in an alternate format [online](#) through socialsecurity.gov using the current internet SNO process. The SNO process will not change with the implementation of the new accommodation process. See [TC 00101.021](#), Special Notice Options for Blind or Visually Impaired Persons.

- Locally available accommodations. Under certain situations, an FO or HO may be able to provide accommodations that other offices cannot. For example, an office may have a bariatric chair available for members of the public. However, bariatric chairs are not available in every office. We refer to these accommodations as locally available accommodations. See [GN 00211.001](#) for a complete list of accommodations.

2. Non-Standard Accommodations

In some instances, a member of the public may indicate that a standard accommodation is insufficient to provide meaningful access. When this occurs, an individual has the option to request a different type of accommodation. We refer to these requests as non-standard accommodations, which is one that our offices do not routinely provide. Employees in the FOs and HOs should consult with their management on the proper process for non-standard accommodation requests.

C. Action

If you receive an inquiry from a qualified individual with a disability requesting an accommodation, follow these instructions:

1. Explain to the caller that under the provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, he or she can request accommodations to conduct their business with SSA.
2. Determine, if possible, the type of accommodation the individual is requesting.
3. Can you provide the accommodation over the telephone?

NOTE: For most telephone contacts, agents are limited in the accommodations that they can provide over the telephone and record on iAccommodate, e.g., Special Notice Option (SNO), setting up a text telephone connection (TTY) or when an individual calls and an agent might set up assistance of a state telephone relay systems operator or video relay service (VRS) interpreter.

- If **yes**,
 - provide the accommodation, e.g., Special Notice Option (SNO), setting up a text telephone connection (TTY), etc.
 - select the Intranet Main Menu (IMAIN) link.
 - select Person Information (Identity, Contact, Accommodation) to access iAccommodate.
 - enter the SSN on the Person Information SSN query page. On the Person Information on the RECORD screen, scroll to the Accommodation Information heading and select “Edit”. Complete the required information on the Request for Reasonable Accommodation screen (MSOM iACCOMM 001.002), including the accommodation you provided.
 - STOP.

NOTE: Do not solicit a member of the public for their disability, impairment, or possible accommodation. We rely on individuals with disabilities to let us know if they need an accommodation.

- If **no** (You cannot provide the accommodation over the telephone), go to step 4.
4. If the caller is requesting that an accommodation be provided in an office he or she will be visiting:
- tell the caller that you will contact the office directly to request the accommodation.
 - refer the request to the servicing office via MDW (non-MSSICS cases) or a DW01 (MSSICS cases). On the MDW/DW01, indicate the accommodation requested and any other pertinent information.
 - advise the caller that someone from the office will contact him or her about the request.

Section History

Go To [Transmittal](#)

Minor Change Explanation

Effective Date Title

03/27/2017 [Handling requests for standard and non-standard accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)

Prior Versions of Section

Effective Date Title

03/24/2017 - 02/14/2018 [Handling requests for standard and non-standard accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)

03/24/2017 - 03/23/2017 [Handling requests for standard and non-standard accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)

03/24/2017 - 03/23/2017 [Handling requests for standard and non-standard accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)

10/23/2014 - 03/23/2017 [Handling requests for standard and non-standard accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)

Link to this section:

(b) (7)(E)

OVERVIEW OF THE SPECIAL NOTICE OPTION (SNO) PROCESS

Presented by

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy, Office of Income Security Programs, Notices and
Strategic Planning Staff

October 25, 2017

Introduction to Special Notice Options for the Blind or Visually Impaired

The special notice options for the blind or visually impaired are commonly referred to using the acronym SNO.

The special notice options allow persons who are blind or visually impaired to receive notices and other communications (e.g., pamphlets) from the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Disability Determination Services (DDS) in formats other than standard print.

Note: DDS are State agencies fully funded by the Federal Government responsible for developing medical evidence and making the initial determination on disability claims.

Special Notice Options for the Blind or Visually Impaired

The special notice options apply to Retirement, Survivors, Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) notices and other communications that are sent to:

- ▶ applicants,
- ▶ beneficiaries,
- ▶ recipients, and
- ▶ representative payees who are blind or visually impaired.

Special Notice Options for the Blind or Visually Impaired (Cont'd)

Note: Proof of blindness or visual impairment for a person to receive a special notice option is not required. We accept the person's allegation of blindness or visual impairment for providing a special notice option for the blind or visually impaired.

Legal History of Special Notice Options for the Blind or Visually Impaired

The legal history of the special notice options is as follows:

- ▶ Beginning July 1, 1988, SSA provided two special notice options to SSI blind applicants and recipients. The two special options were (1) certified mail and (2) first-class mail followed by a supplementary telephone call. The special notice options allowed people who were blind to choose an alternate way to receive certain notices from SSA to prevent a possible loss of benefits because they could not read a standard print notice.
- ▶ Beginning July 1, 1990, SSA extended the two special notice options to all disabled claimants and beneficiaries who applied for or were receiving disability benefits on the basis of blindness.
- ▶ Beginning June 30, 2008, SSA offered the two special notice options to any disabled or SSI applicant, beneficiary, or recipient who received benefits based on blindness, was blind, or told us he or she needed assistance because of a visual impairment.

Legal History of Special Notice Options for the Blind or Visually Impaired (Cont'd)

On October 20, 2009, the United States District Court for the Northern District of California partially ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in the class action lawsuit *American Council of the Blind v. Astrue*. The class action was brought under a civil rights statute that protects people with disabilities. To comply with the court order, SSA had to develop and offer a Braille alternative and a navigable Microsoft (MS) Word CD alternative no later than April 15, 2010.” The Court extended this date to May 24, 2010.

Available special notice options:

The Social Security Administration (SSA) offers the following alternate formats:

- ▶ standard print notice by certified mail;
- ▶ standard print notice by first-class mail and a follow-up telephone call to read the notice within 5 business days from the date of the notice;
- ▶ Braille notice and a standard print notice by first-class mail;
- ▶ data compact disc (CD) in Microsoft Word format and a standard print notice by first-class mail;

NOTE: The data CD requires a computer with software that can open Microsoft Word files.

- ▶ large print notice (18 point font) and a standard print notice by first-class mail;
or
- ▶ audio compact disc (CD) and a standard print notice by first-class mail.

Standard Print Notice by First-class Mail and a Follow up Telephone Call

- ▶ We will attempt to contact the person three times by telephone during normal business hours to read the notice;
- ▶ We will ask for identifying information, including the person's SSN, when we call to read the notice; and
- ▶ We will answer questions and help fill out forms

How do we produce the alternate formats?

If the person with a special notice option of Braille, data compact disc (CD), audio CD, or large print requests a form or other communication from SSA, we route the request to a vendor to convert the document(s) to the alternate format and then the vendor mails the documents in the person's selected alternate format.

Other Special Notice Accommodations:

Blind or visually impaired applicants, recipients, beneficiaries, and representative payees may request:

- ▶ a notice format that the Social Security Administration (SSA) does not automatically provide, or
- ▶ a special notice format for notices or other communications that SSA issues for purposes other than those referenced in our disability and SSI programs.

We call this a request for an alternative accommodation. SSA must approve a request for an alternative accommodation, unless it determines that:

- ▶ one or more of the automatically approved options is an effective means of communication with the person, or
- ▶ the request, if granted, will result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of SSA's programs, or
- ▶ The request, if granted, will cause undue financial and administrative burdens to the agency.

When do we offer the special notice options?

We offer the special notice options to any Retirement, Survivor, Disability and SSI applicant, beneficiary, recipient, or representative payee who is blind or visually impaired, or tells us he or she needs assistance because of a visual impairment during:

- ▶ all initial application interviews;
- ▶ all redetermination interviews; and
- ▶ any post-eligibility interview if the person alleges difficulty reading standard print notices.

We also offer the special notice options anytime we notice that a person might benefit from them.

How are notices with special notice options dated?

Notices provided in an alternate format display the same notice date as the standard print notice. We post-date the notices to allow vendors time to prepare and mail the notices. The amount of time for the vendors varies depending on the type of notice (i.e. a due process notice may have a shorter timeframe than an informational notice).

In addition, both the standard print and the special notice option vendors must adhere to the same timeframe for preparing and mailing the notice. This ensures that both notices are mailed at approximately the same time.

Can someone change a special notice option?

A person may change his or her special notice option at any time.

However, due to systems limitations, the public can change a special notice option only once per day using the Internet iSNO application.

NOTE: iSNO is an application we use to record and query a person's requested special notice option. We also use the iSNO application to record and update the telephone number in iSNO when the chosen option is a follow-up telephone call.

Contacting SSA to request a special notice option

To request a special notice option, a person may:

- ▶ Visit the SSA website at www.socialsecurity.gov/notices to make an online request;
- ▶ Call the SSA national toll-free number 1-800-772-1213 or our toll-free TTY number 1-800-325-0778 for people who are deaf or hard of hearing;
- ▶ Write, call, or visit the local Social Security field office (FO);

Unavailability of certain notice types

The special notice options are not available for certain notice types:

- ▶ passwords to access online services,
- ▶ form SSA-7005 (Social Security statements),
- ▶ enumeration (requests for new or replacement Social Security numbers),
- ▶ Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), and
- ▶ Special Veteran's Benefits

Reference:

NL 01001.000 (<https://secure.ssa.gov/poms.nsf/lnx/0901001000>)

Special Notice Options for the Blind or Visually Impaired

Contacts:

(b) (6)

[Redacted]

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QUESTIONS?