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Memorandum on Action To Prevent Prison Inmates From Inappropriately Receiving Federal Benefits

April 25, 1998

Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

Subject: Use of the Social Security Administration's Prisoner Database to Prevent Prison Inmates from Inappropriately Receiving Federal Benefits

The Social Security Administration ("SSA") is required by law to suspend Old Age and Survivors and Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income benefits to certain persons who are incarcerated. To carry out the law, the SSA, with the assistance of the Federal Bureau of Prisons and various State and local entities, developed a database of persons who are incarcerated. Other agencies, too, including the Departments of Agriculture, Education, Labor, and Veterans Affairs, operate Federal benefit programs that have statutory requirements to reduce, suspend, or terminate benefits to those who are incarcerated.

All of these agencies have been carrying out the requirements to suspend or reduce Federal benefits to prison inmates. However, the agencies' enforcement of these requirements independently, rather than in coordination, is not the most efficient use of Government resources and has not allowed the agencies to enforce these requirements to the greatest effect. Therefore, to provide for a coordinated government-wide effort to improve the implementation of the laws permitting suspension or reduction of Federal benefits to prison inmates and to use Government resources more efficiently, I hereby direct executive departments and agencies to take the following actions, to the extent permitted by law:

(1) By November 1, 1998, the Social Security Administration shall provide access to its prisoner database, on a reimbursable basis, to Federal agencies that administer benefit programs and to appropriate State and local entities that administer benefit programs in cooperation with Federal agencies. The SSA shall assist these agencies as necessary to allow quick and efficient access to the SSA prisoner database. By May 1, 1999, the agencies should make operational their computer systems that are to conduct the matches between their benefit program databases and the SSA prisoner database;

(2) The Departments of Education, Labor, and Veterans Affairs and Food Stamp agencies acting as agents for the Department of Agriculture, shall conduct matches between their benefit program databases and SSA's prisoner database to identify ineligible recipients of benefits on their benefit rosters. Agencies that have begun to conduct matches of their benefit program databases with SSA's prisoner database or other agencies' databases shall continue that work;

(3) Other executive agencies with benefit programs shall review such programs and determine whether it is appropriate and cost effective to conduct a match of their benefit program databases with the SSA prisoner database;

(4) Based on their matches with the SSA prisoner database, agencies that identify ineligible recipients shall immediately take action to suspend, reduce, or terminate benefits as permitted by law; and

(5) The agencies shall work with the Commissioner of Social Security and State and local governments, where appropriate, and take whatever actions are practicable to carry out this memorandum. The Commissioner of Social Security shall report to me within 180 days on the actions the SSA and other agencies have taken to implement this memorandum.

I believe that this coordinated government-wide approach to terminating, suspending, or reducing Federal benefits to prison inmates will more fully carry out the intention of the Federal laws restricting payment of benefits to prison inmates and will provide savings in Federal benefit programs.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON