

The Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General (OIG) announced today the release of a report examining the timeliness of Public Safety Officers' Benefits Programs (PSOB) claims processing by the Office of Justice Programs' (OJP) Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). The OIG's audit found significant delays in OJP's claims processing.

The PSOB provides death benefits to survivors of fallen law enforcement officers, firefighters, and other first responders, and disability benefits to officers catastrophically injured in the line of duty. Between FYs 2008 and 2013, which were the focus of the OIG's audit, OJP provided \$464 million in death benefits and \$43 million in disability benefits to eligible claimants, and the one-time benefit amount for approved death or disability claims increased from \$303,064 to \$328,613. In FY 2014, the one-time benefit payment amount was \$333,605.

The audit analyzed approximately 2,500 claims in PSOB's database, of which about 1,850 claims had been decided and 650 cases remained pending at the time of our audit. According to its current Strategic Plan, PSOB's performance goal for providing efficient, timely, and survivor-centered benefits to claimants is to decide claims in less than a year, yet we found that OJP required more than a year to process at least 25 percent of the 1,845 completed death and disability claims included in our review. 79 of these claims took more than 2 years to decide. Of the pending claims, we found that 69 claims had been pending for more than 3 years.

The OIG identified three primary factors contributing to the most significant delays in processing claims: (1) claimants filing incomplete benefit claims applications, an issue we attributed to the inadequate application guidance provided by the PSOB Office, which is the office within BJA that is responsible for reviewing the claims; (2) claimants and other agencies being unresponsive to PSOB Office requests for additional information regarding a claim; and (3) the PSOB Office often not adequately documenting the bases for its determinations, which delayed OJP's subsequent legal reviews of claims determinations.

The audit also found that the PSOB Office inadequately reported annual data on its performance measures, and that its database of claims-related information was inconsistent and did not include data fields for important claims processing milestones.

The claims reviewed for this audit were all processed, entirely or substantially, prior to an important change in the management of the PSOB claims processing, pursuant to which OJP transferred the responsibility for legal reviews of claims determinations from the OJP Office of General Counsel to a newly created PSOB Legal Counsel position within the BJA. Consequently, while today's report describes this change, it does not assess its effect on the timeliness of claims processing.

The report makes four recommendations to OJP to help the PSOB improve the timeliness of its claims processing and the usefulness of its performance reporting. OJP agreed with all of the recommendations.

Today's report can be found on the OIG's website at the following link: <https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2015/a1521.pdf>.