

NWX-HHS ACF

Moderator: Yuliya Rza

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1:00 pm CT

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time all participants are in listen-only mode. After the presentation there will be a question-and-answer session. To ask a question at that time, press star then 1, please.

Today's conference is being recorded. If there are any objections, you may disconnect at this time.

I would now like to turn the meeting over to Lauren Christopher. You may begin.

Lauren Christopher: Thank you and greetings to everyone. Thank you for joining us for today's Webinar for state grantees.

We are holding this Webinar as a forum for discussion amongst all of you to discuss what you're doing in your state with regard to social security number collection and verification.

I am joined today in ACF by Ms. Yuliya RZad. She is a new member of our staff. She's in the Presidential Management Fellowship Program and she has prior experience working on LIHEAP at the local level in California.

And so before I turn it over to her, I just want to make a few introductory remarks. You can see our agenda on the Webinar today. I'll be making the first few remarks about some staffing changes at our agency.

I'm with the Division of Energy Assistance and the Administration for Children and Families. And after that we will be turning it over to Yuliya to introduce our three state speakers from Missouri, Connecticut and Maryland.

So many of you have probably met and/or worked with two members of our staff, Zack Poimboeuf, who has been the Regional Liaison for Regions 2 and 8, and prior to that, Region 10.

Zack has accepted another position within the Department of Health and Human Services. And this is his last week with us on LIHEAP. And so he will be remaining with HHS. He'll actually move into the office that is coordinating the HHS program integrity initiative and he'll be beginning there in April. So we wish him well.

And so you can see from the Webinar that temporarily we have reassigned Regions 2 and 8 to Ms. Yuliya RZad. And she'll be working with you in the short term.

A second departure from our office is Ms. Karmen Blackwell. Both Karmen and Zack actually had joined our division in 2006. And several of you have probably worked with them through our compliance review process, which they have been leading for the past several years.

Karmen is also remaining with HHS and she's moving to the Food and Drug Administration. Her last week will be next week and she'll be starting there in mid-April.

So we wish them both the best of luck. And as you can see her regions, she's been working with Regions 1, 3 and 4. And so Regions 1 and 4 will now be served by Ms. Trudy Hairston. And Region 3 will be served by Ms. Rosa Chapman.

And so you can see the current regional liaison assignments for the short term. When we are able to make more permanent replacements we will notify all of you about those changes.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at 202-401-4870.

And we're actually beginning our compliance review season next week, so several of us will be in and out on travel for the next few months and visiting several of you. So again, if you have troubles reaching anyone, please call myself as well as Nick St. Angelo.

And so lastly before I turn it over to Yuliya, I would just like to, again, preface why we are holding this Webinar today. As you know, social security numbers became a very prominent topic as a result of the GAO report in 2010. And our office had issued guidance to LIHEAP grantees through (NIM) in May of 2010 strongly encouraging grantees to collect social security numbers.

You may be aware that in January of 2011 we convened a program integrity working group, which is comprised of several state grantees from all of the

regions as well as some tribal and territory members, as well as representatives from several local community (acting) agencies or local administering agencies, as well as some federal agency partners from the SNAP program and TANF.

And so that workgroup is scheduled to submit a report of their recommendations to us by June of this year. And we have been receiving updates on that work and are eager to review and to share the results of all of that when we are able to with all of you.

So in the meantime we want you to know that we are continuing our work and research into these issues. We know that a lot of you have been trying to make headway with entering into agreements data - exchange agreements with Social Security Administration and other partners to try to verify the data that you're receiving on clients. And we just want to make sure that you have opportunities to share amongst yourselves all the great work that you're doing while we -- at the federal level -- continue to look at how we could be helpful to you in this process.

We are also anticipating issuing some more guidance relating to social security numbers in the near future.

So this is just one of several opportunities that we'll be providing over the coming months regarding our continued conversations on program integrity and these issues that came out of the GAO report.

So without further ado, I'd like to turn it over to Yuliya to introduce us to our three speakers today. Thank you.

Yuliya RZad: Wonderful. Thank you, Lauren, for that introduction. And I would like to thank our speakers for volunteering to share their experiences with all of you. That would be Ms. Heather Jones of Missouri and Mr. Chuck Anderson of Connecticut and Mr. Ralph Markus of Maryland.

And I'm going to turn it over to Heather just in a minute as soon as I pull up her presentation. Each of the states will be showing a brief presentation, but the correct one.

And afterwards we'll be emailing out all three presentations to all of you.

And I'm sorry you're getting a sneak peek of it. All right, so Heather, it's all for you.

Heather Jones: Thank you. And thank you for having me a part of this conference call. I hope that the State of Missouri can be the Show Me State for the rest of the states in showing you what we've done, but also be open to suggestions from other states as we're trying to continuously improve our program here also.

So I'll just start off with my presentation and definitely be around for question and answers afterwards.

My name is Heather Jones. I am the Missouri LIHEAP Manager. And I've been in my position since 2006.

I wanted to go over today our agreement that we have with the Social Security Administration.

As many of you know if you've been working in this area, we do have an Information Exchange Agreement, and all of us make that with the Social

Security Administration. Unfortunately it has to be done on a state-by-state basis. And in the past it even had to be done by department-by-department in each state. And so that can make challenges and it feels like a replication of effort.

But the Missouri Department of Social Services has this Information Exchange Agreement with the Social Security Administration. We've had one in place for many years for all of our social service programs, including SNAP, TANF, Child Support and a variety of other social services that our department provides.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program has been a part of that because we are considered what's called an Income Maintenance or Welfare Program. And so we've been included in that and I'll kind of go over how that's changed over the years with the Social Security Administration.

But the purpose of this agreement -- as many of you know and if you've been working in this -- is to establish the terms and the conditions and the safeguards under which the Social Security Administration will disclose information to administer federally-funded programs that are state-administered.

And I have given you just the first shot, the first screenshot of our Information Exchange Agreement between the Social Security Administration and the State of Missouri.

And you will see it'll say the Department of Social Services. We've actually moved some of this agreement to our Office of Administration to cover our entire state.

Please note if you look at this slide, you'll see down towards the bottom the second to last one, that Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program is actually a checkbox on this agreement now.

One thing I wanted to share with everyone is that hasn't always been the case in the past. And in fact in the past the previous agreement to this one just had, for example, TANF, SNAP and Energy Assistance. It didn't have the federally-funded benefit programs even spelled out.

The one previous to that -- which I believe was in 2000 -- only just said Department of Social Services. So I guess from my experience and what I wanted to share with you is look to see if you don't already have an Information Exchange Agreement with your department or with your state or with your IT staff with the Social Security Administration.

It could be that they do have an agreement for things such as Medicaid, Temporary Assistance, the SNAP program, Child Support Enforcement where you could literally just hook into that and be a part of that program by simply having it revised this year to include the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

Now that get you your agreement, and there's also security requirements with that, as the other presentations I'm sure will talk about.

But you may want to be your first step in this whole process is does our state have an agreement out there. If it does have an agreement, is there a way I can already become a part of that agreement or do we need to establish agreement from scratch? I think you might be further down the road than you may have anticipated.

We do SSA data exchange with their State Data Exchange System, also our State Verification Exchange System. And we use Beneficiary and Earnings Data Exchange.

(Enter) the SDX and SVES, data is transferred directly between the Social Security Administration and the State of Missouri's Office of Administration Information Services Technology Division. And what they do is they do that through a file transfer management system, which has to be a secured process that the Social Security Administration has to approve.

The SVES provides verifications of social security numbers, as well as a death match for our state. And we don't actually currently tape match with our own Bureau of Vital Records, we actually tape match with the Social Security Administration concerning date of death information.

In the (business sense) process is used to determine social security retirement, disability and SSI information. We actually are able to access the system. It's a delayed process for our contractors, and after three days it will return income information. I'll show that in later slides in this presentation.

So when we do a LIHEAP Social Security Number Verification, the first thing I want to point out is that we ask for documentation at the time that we're processing an application. And that documentation can include an award letter. It can include the copies of the social security card. It can include a paycheck stub that has their social security number on it.

It also states that if they're already receiving state assistance from another program such as TANF, Food Stamps or Child Support Enforcement that they don't need to provide us social security numbers because we are running

through this verification process on the state level and we probably have already verified their social security number through other means.

So we found that actually moving to a verification process helped us and some of our low income participants not having to go back and find those social security cards because we already had them in our systems, we have already verified with the Social Security Administration so we know that what they've given us is a valid social security number.

We have nicely file transfer management systems that include our death match. And we do a weekly verification on the SSN verification.

We were doing both of these matches weekly in our system. But we went to a nightly on the death match because we were actually - at the time that the applications are being entered the applicant and all the members' social security numbers are entered into our database, and that night is transferred to Social Security Administration for a date of death match.

If any of those come back we generate a daily report the next morning and we check with those cases to see if they've been included on a case and what date of death was used and if we have an application where someone has put someone who is deceased on our application and applied for services fraudulently.

So we've moved to daily process to prevent fraud from even occurring before the case has even been determined eligible or there's any payment on the case.

Our weekly verification reports are sent on a weekly basis for the verification of the number. And the reason we do this weekly is most of the information we're getting back from the Social Security Administration is not that it's not

a valid social security number. There's either a mismatch on name, date of birth or some other identifying factor. We find very few unverified social security numbers that are completely not in the social security number system.

In federal fiscal year 2012, Missouri received a total of 2393 death matches and 1984 unverified SSNs. And again on those unverified SSNs, that could be date of birth and name.

When you consider our total household members was in excess of 390,000 members, those numbers we're getting back are not very large. And the reason this could be is because they're already participating in a lot of other federal-funded programs like SNAP, like TANF, and we're already catching them in that process.

Or it could be that because we asked for the documentation upfront when we're processing applications, we're preventing a lot of the fraud that happened there. Many unverified SSNs were not existing because issues with names and date of births were also an issue and maybe last name changes.

What you're going to see on the screen now is the way we transmit a request from Social Security Administration. And yes, we entered a contract with agencies in Missouri, 18 which are Community Action Agency. And the City of St. Louis we're with Urban League.

And those agencies have access to this LIHEAP system that you're seeing here and they can request social security information online. It is a three-day delay process. And what's going to come back is the income information and if they're paying SMI or Part D.

So it's through the (BNDX) system that the contractor agency completes an online request. And they enter the information into this screen. And then if you see the next screen after three days, this is the information that'll be brought back, including name, social security, their monthly benefit amount, and if they received any SMI or co-pays associated to that.

The contractor can use this information in determining income eligibility for LIHEAP cases.

So when I say that a lot of people get nervous, including Social Security Administration. You may be thinking that same thing yourself. But we do have - it is included in our Information Exchange Agreement requirement that we can provide this information.

We do restrict the access to the data tape from Social Security to leave those authorized state employees and contractors and agency needed to perform their official duties and connected purposes with your IEA.

Yes, you can include contractors in this. They do have to sign confidentiality statements. They do have to comply with Social Security data disclosure requirements.

And we also include in our Missouri Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program contract agreements wording that states we have a contract with Social Security Administration to obtain information to determine edibility for LIHEAP and the state agency will provide copies of this contract for the contractor and they agree to uphold all the terms and requirements of a contractor, including management of oversight of all (line) access.

And it is only to be used for LIHEAP eligibility determination, no other purpose. In other words, if we have a contractor that's working with CSBG -- the Community Services Block Grant -- or even any HUD programs, they are not to use Social Security Administration from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program for other federally-funded programs because that agreement isn't included here for them to do that. And we train on that and make that very clear to them.

I'll take questions at the end of the presentation. I just wanted to say I appreciate the opportunity to talk about what Missouri is doing. We're still looking to improve our program integrity.

The numbers are not significant, but we've had this kind of data match with Social Security Administration through the Department of Social Services for many years. And I think that that's helped our program integrity overall as a Social Service Agency with the Family Support Division.

And that concludes the presentation from the State of Missouri.

Yuliya RZad: Thank you, Heather, very much for your presentation.

So up next we'll hear from Chuck Anderson from Connecticut as I pull up his presentation. And there it is. So Chuck, take it away.

Chuck Anderson: Good afternoon. My name is Chuck Anderson. I work for the State Department of Social Services in Connecticut in the Energy Unit.

I'm joined by a colleague -- who also worked on the SSN verification project -- named (Mike Gianetti). He's from the Management Information Services. And I'm going to give you an update on what Connecticut's doing.

For many years in Connecticut, Energy Assistance applicants have been required to provide social security numbers for all household members. During the summer of 2010 we decided to begin verifying the social security numbers of households certified as eligible for LIHEAP benefits by running their numbers through the State Verification and Exchange System on a weekly basis.

This initiative was taken in response to the report issue by the Government Accountability Office in June of 2010.

In Connecticut the agreement with the Social Security Administration was already being used to verify SSNs for other federal programs, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid, TFA, Single-Adult General Assistance and State Supplement to the Aged, Blind and Disabled. LIHEAP was also included in the agreement.

In Connecticut (Numadent) is the database, the State Verification Exchange System is the interface.

Two different computer systems are used by the Community Action Agencies in Connecticut to process Energy Assistance Applications. The (CAPTAIN) system is used in several states in addition to Connecticut. And there's another system -- (FuelWare) -- which is only used in Connecticut.

In order to run weekly SSN reports formats have to be developed and agency identification code was assigned to each Community Action Agency. Also the reports have to be available in a txt format rather than Excel.

SSN reports for each Community Action Agency are pulled from each agency's computer system each Monday and are downloaded into a dedicated computer drive. The results -- which only reflect non-matches -- are available to be downloaded every Thursday morning by Community Action Agency Liaisons.

Community Action Agency Liaisons are people designated to retrieve the weekly reports and to then resolve non-matches. Each Community Action Agency in the state has a liaison. We currently have 11 Community Action Agencies in Connecticut.

A selected number of liaisons from this group were organized into a subcommittee during the 2010/11 program year to assist with the development of procedures to resolve non-matches.

Beyond providing a list of non-matches, weekly reports contain numeric codes that can help liaisons determine possible reasons for non-matches.

For example, a Number 1 indicates a total non-match. Number 3 indicates that the social security number and date of birth don't match. And Number 5 indicates that the surname and a given name do not match. And an asterisk followed by a social security number can indicate a possible transposition error.

Another tool available for use in Connecticut is the Eligibility Management System, otherwise known as EMS which documents information for persons receiving public assistance.

The client demographic screen includes a person's social security number. It can be used as a comparison for the SSN reports.

The first steps taken to resolve non-matches do not include contacting of client. A liaison first reviews (hard file) information to determine whether applicant information was entered incorrectly into the computer system when the application was taken.

If a mistake such as a transposition error is identified, the case is recertified. If the liaison determines that all information was entered correctly, the client is contacted in an attempt to resolve the discrepancy. If the reason for the non-match is identified, the case is recertified to correct the computer file.

If at this point a reason for the discrepancy cannot be determined and there is no suspicion of fraud, the client is directed to resolve the issue directly with SSA. They can call their local office. They can call the toll-free number, which is 1-800-772-1213. Or they can access the SSA Web site at www.socialsecurity.gov.

Benefits are suspended until the non-match is corrected. Cases in which fraud is suspected are referred to the department's fraud investigation unit for review.

With regard to deceased individuals, non-matches are identified on the weekly report by an X followed by the reported date of death.

In Connecticut most of these deaths have been those of household members that died after an application was entered into the computer but before that application was certified.

Others have been cases in which an widow or widower was using the social security number of their deceased spouse as an identification to receive public benefits to which they were entitled.

Cases involving deaths do require recertification. However, due to the sensitive nature of these cases, many liaisons prefer to verify information through the Social Security Death Index to ensure the accuracy of the information before discussing the discrepancy with the family.

During the 2010/11 pilot year, approximately 150,000 social security numbers were run. We focused that year in working out computer issues, developing procedures and resolving identified non-matches. Re-certifications were focused on cases involving deceased individuals.

The non-match rate for the pilot year was 6.92%. This year liaisons have been expected to resolve non-matches on a weekly basis. So far the non-match rate -- which I track weekly -- is 5.21%, which is a documented reduction of 1.71%.

Non-match rates have improved at each of the Community Action Agencies. The lower rate this year reflects efforts made by agencies to resolve discrepancies last year. In general, it appears that larger agencies have more difficulty resolving non-matches than smaller agencies.

The process to verify social security numbers in Connecticut is viewed by us as an intermediate but significant step. We look forward to the day when a cost-effective real-time Web site is available for use by Community Action Agencies or other qualified nonprofit agencies.

Our short-term goals for 2012/13 is to help Community Action Agencies further reduce their non-match rates and to continue to refine procedures used to resolve non-matches. We will focus our technical assistance on those agencies with higher non-match rates, which are typically the larger agencies.

If you have any questions about my presentation, you can email me at charles.anderson@ct.gov or you can feel free to call me at area code 860-424-5820. Thank you.

Yuliya Rza: All right. Thank you very much, Chuck.

And our last presenter will be Mr. Ralph Markus from Maryland. And as soon as his presentation is up -- which is now -- he can go ahead and start.

Ralph Markus: Thank you very much. I think while all of us are doing the same thing, we're all doing it in a little different fashion. And just to quickly go over.

The Information Exchange Agreement - actually there's two types of Information Exchange Agreements. One is at an agency level and the other's at a state level. My guess is that most of them are ending up being at the agency level.

And this agreement identifies the programs and Social Security Data Exchange Systems that are used for verification. Also the method of data transfer security procedures and the safeguarding of PII, or Personally Identifiable Information.

There's also a second agreement that is essentially an attachment to the Information Exchange Agreement, and that has to do with Computer Matching and Privacy Protection Act. And that sets forth the terms and

conditions governing the disclosure of data and the fact that the data is used to entitlement and eligibility for the federal programs. And LIHEAP -- as was mentioned earlier -- is now included in the list of programs.

And information about the agreement is available on the Social Security Administration Web site at this Web address. The agreement process essentially is established through the Social Security Administration's regional offices.

In Maryland what actually happened several years ago -- actually I think it was even before the GAO report came out -- we had inquired about becoming part of the department's agreement, which it was up for renewal. It had already been in existence and at that time we were actually turned down in part because we were contracting with Community Action Agencies and Social Security did have an issue in regards to security and confidentiality.

However, we were later added and it was almost automatic. It was around the time that the GAO was - I don't think the report had actually come out, but the investigation had started and our program was just added to it. And actually I wasn't informed initially. I later found out as I started to investigate in response to the GAO report that that was a pleasant surprise that we really did not have to go through any major ordeal in order to become part of the agreement.

Once we knew we were part of the agreement, and of course we knew that we had to take some steps to do something in regards to verification, we met with our software contractor to go over what we needed to explain the requirements.

We also met with the (HR) Technical Liaison to Social Security because we were already - the department was already running verifications for its other programs for SNAP and TANF and so forth. So we wanted to just build on that and then a system design document was developed in order to put everything in place.

Essentially our data is sent and returned on a weekly basis. The data file is sent on Thursday evening and it's returned on Tuesday evenings and it updates our data system.

The information that's sent includes all applicant and all members of the household. And to date we've sent somewhere in the neighborhood of 344,000 records.

I will mention that we just started doing this at the beginning of October. Actually the first file went over the last week of September and was returned the first week of October. And we start taking applications in July, so that first file was a large one.

In the process of looking at numbers, the numbers that are excluded that would of course be invalid are ones that start with 000, 666 and the 900 series. Social Security Administration does not issue social security numbers that start with those numbers.

And the 900 series is reserved for the Internal Revenue Service for its Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers. And that's essentially used for tax purposes for people that -- for whatever reason -- cannot get a social security number. Usually that's for immigrants.

The data that we have verified is of course a social security number, last and first name. Those are required fields.

The middle initial, date of birth and sex code or gender are not required. So if we happen to have a blank field on those it doesn't check. But if it is filled out it will verify one way or the other.

And similar to what's already been said, the verification process will identify if the social security number is an actively assigned number at this point in time. It will also identify whether the social security number belongs to a deceased person.

Now one piece of information that we're not getting from Social Security is the date of death. But we are in the process of establishing another procedure through our state verification system to identify the date of death. And we've run into a few little technical issues on that, but that should be corrected shortly.

If we include the gender, we do have a gender match. Also the date of birth match and it'll also tell us whether there's multiple matches.

Things to know, that when the data goes over, any punctuation in the name is removed. Also items like senior, junior, I, II, III that are part of a name are removed as well. And I've mentioned before any of the optional fields -- if they're blank -- they're not verified.

With the information that's come back, it's actually been kind of interesting. The whole thing has been a very interesting process and I think we're learning a lot.

Most of the invalid information that has come back has been more on household members rather than on applicants. Now we do receive applications through the mail, in person and also online. And it's very interesting to note that when somebody fills out an application online, a number of times it seems that they don't know the correct social security number for their children.

Most of the invalid hits that we've had have been on name. But in reality it's not really the name, it's the social security number that was typed in wrong. We're finding - of course there's some names that are mistyped, but the majority of the invalid codes that we're coming up with are because the social security number itself has a typo in it.

And then gender, that's something that we've been working on lately. We found out that in our data system we have a default, the female. And we've discovered that a lot of the data entry workers are just leaving the default value and not changing it to the correct value. And then we've also been finding out that there's been typographical errors on date of birth.

The other things that we're finding out is some of the social security cards can be difficult to read, particularly if it's a copy. We have - in a few instances have discovered that social security does not always have the correct information, particularly on gender or date of birth.

And we are looking to the future. We're using more this year as basically a pilot to learn exactly what we're faced with. And we're gradually working towards getting these things resolved to reduce the number of typographical errors and any other kind of errors and we'll be moving more towards that as we start the next year.

The information -- when it comes back -- is coded into our database. And even though it comes back as coded numbers, it's converted into text so that our local workers can see exactly why it's coded as invalid.

And for next year we're working with our software contractor so that when an application is entered, normally it'll pull up data from the prior year. And in the instances where there is an invalid code, it's not going to pull up that person's social security number and information, so it'll have to be rekeyed in. And hopefully the next time it'll be correct.

We're also going to include some questions and some research during our monitoring process to track what's happening with the social security information. We also are looking at doing a weekly report in regards to social security.

We also have another report that we are currently doing on a weekly schedule of duplicate applications, which essentially is based on address. And we run a report here at the state level to identify duplicate applications and then we inform the various local agencies when we spot a duplicate and have them correct that.

And that's the end of my presentation. I'm certainly open for any questions. And again, my name is Ralph Markus. If you want to email me, my email address is rmarkus -- R-M-A-R-K-U-S -- @dhr.state.md.us. Or my direct phone number is 410-767-7415.

And I thank you very much. And I know I'm certainly finding all of this very interesting and I think we're all available to answer any questions.

Yuliya RZad: Wonderful. Thank you very much, Mr. Markus.

So at this point we're going to open it up for Q&A. We have plenty of time, we have the line until 4. So if you have a question I promise we'll get to you.

I believe you should hit star 1 and then the operator will facilitate the Q&A session.

Coordinator: One moment for our first question, please.

Our first question from (Blesi Gundon). (Blesi), your line is open.

Our next question from...

(Blesi Gundon): Hello, hello. Can you hear me now?

Okay. I had a question for the gentleman from Connecticut. You were just saying that when SSN number is incorrect and it's not anything to do with your internal process that you send the customer back to Social Security Administration and that their benefit is held. How long before you get the information back from the customer?

Chuck Anderson: Each agency - it depends on the client themselves. It's in their best interest to resolve a non-match if it's a problem with SSN.

I think Ralph had mentioned, we have some cases where the actual information, the Social Security Administration had itself was incorrect, so they kind of worked that out both ways.

So in some cases they've been successful in restoring them typically within a couple of days. I'm not aware of clients going without benefits as a result of resolving an SSN discrepancy.

(Blesi Gundon): Okay, thanks.

Chuck Anderson: You're welcome.

Coordinator: The next question from (Susan Marshall).

(Susan Marshall): When do you check for a deceased household member? Sometimes we get applications in, you know, a month before we actually work them. Do you check them when you register the application in the system and/or again when you work them? Or do you just check them when you work them?

Heather Jones: Who would you like to respond? This is Heather from the State of Missouri.

We check them when they're entered into our statewide data system. So if they receive an application early, once they register that into the system and they add the members and we check all the social security numbers, that night it goes to the Social Security Administration for a death match for the verification that goes up on a weekly process.

(Susan Marshall): Okay. And how do you handle it? So there is a possibility that someone could die after you've checked that but before you've actually worked the application, correct?

Heather Jones: That is correct. What we do is in the State of Missouri, our policy is that if eligibility is determined and the person deceased after the eligibility was determined, we are going to go ahead and issue the benefit amount because

there wasn't any fraud at the time. The person was alive when the application was completed, we processed the application, they were determined eligible in a part of that household.

However, if the person was added to the application, before the application was determined eligible we're going to remove that person so that they are not included in the household count. They're not issued eligibility benefits as being a part of that household.

If they are put on an application they were deceased prior to the application being entered, which has happened in the State of Missouri. Unfortunately we've had people apply with people who have passed on 10 or 15 years ago. In those cases we just remove them from the application, determine eligibility for the remaining members and move forward.

I don't know how the other states do it.

(Susan Marshall): Thank you, Heather.

Heather Jones: You're welcome.

Chuck Anderson: I can talk in Connecticut if I can have a few seconds on that.

As I explained, because there can be a time difference between when an application is entered into the computer and when the file is certified, we're right now running numbers only for people who have been certified as eligible for LIHEAP benefits.

So right now in Connecticut, so far this year we've run about 120,000 numbers and we've had 88 deceased cases. The bulk of them have been a

death that occurred for a household member between the application date and the certification date. So that file is recertified and most of the time benefits haven't been impacted, but some families have ultimately been over income because of the death. So that's still kind of a work in process.

It's also in terms of there's a single individual living within a household. At this point we terminate benefits, which means that if they have a utility - heated with a utility, the utility company won't get a payment on behalf of that household.

So we still have like issues to work out regarding if this year we started - our benefits accrued as of November 15. If someone died on December 15, should they get a prorated amount sent to the utility company?

We haven't refined our policies to that point where we have those types of processes in place.

(Susan Marshall): Thank you.

Ralph Markus: And in Maryland we also have a work in progress. We haven't really started the full verification process related to death. As I mentioned earlier, we get information back on deaths from social security but we don't get any dates. That's going to have to be done through another process.

We've received somewhere in the neighborhood of about 170 deaths so far. And the small sample that we've investigated they were all after the application date. So in that case we would, again, depending on the exact situation we would probably pay the benefit.

But what we'll be doing in regards to the death match is in our department we have an Office of Inspector General. And they are doing death matches against the state death records. And we'll be sending data to them on a regular basis probably monthly -- which is what the other programs do -- and getting information back on the date of death.

But like we said before, it's still a work in progress as to exactly how we're going to handle each situation.

(Susan Marshall): Thank you, Ralph.

Coordinator: The next question from (Andrea Greg).

(Andrea Greg): Hi. I heard a lot of references to nightly batches, weekly batches. I'm just curious if any of the three states that presented or if anyone on the line has been successful in getting in the online access to SOLQ? That's the real-time online access - or system with the Social Security Administration.

Heather Jones: This is Heather from the State of Missouri. We do have online access for our income (maintenance) programs such as SNAP, (IM). And I even have it at the state level. That has not been something that's been released as a program such as Child Support Enforcement or our contractors that work with this program.

(Andrea Greg): But you do have it for LIHEAP. You were able to get LIHEAP in your agreement for the SOLQ, the real-time?

Heather Jones: No, not for the contractors. I am considered an Income Maintenance Worker at the state level because I work Family Support Division, so I have that access, but I'm covered under because of other programs that I work with.

So my understanding -- and maybe the other states can speak to this -- is they're very reluctant to give that online transaction to anyone other than the SNAP Program and TANF Program.

(Andrea Greg): I just wanted to confirm. That's what we've been told. We've been told that they will not give it for LIHEAP, they will only give it for SNAP, TANF and Medicaid and they're citing Social Security Act, I think Section 1137 or 1167.

So I was just curious if any state had been successful and getting anywhere with their regional offices.

Heather Jones: I doubt it. And the one reason I'll give you is the example of Child Support Enforcement who has access to a lot of data systems...

(Andrea Greg): Right.

Heather Jones: ...that they don't have online access too.

(Andrea Greg): Okay. All right, thank you.

Heather Jones: And they're (Part 4D) of the Social Security Administration. So...

(Andrea Greg): Okay, thank you.

Heather Jones: You're welcome.

Coordinator: Once again, to ask a question, star 1 please. And our next question from (Don Williams).

(Kathy Andree): Hello. This is actually (Kathy Andree). I'm from the State of California. And we have two questions.

And the first question is we want to understand if HHS is going to require social security number collection in the future. Obviously sometimes with our clients it's a challenge because it's not a federal mandate to collect that information.

And if not, I'm just curious with the states that are - presented today, if your state mandates collection of the social security number. So that's our Question 1.

Yuliya RZad: This is Yuliya RZad from HHS. I will say that currently HHS strongly encourages the collection of social security numbers, although it is not mandated and I'm not aware of a policy anytime in the near future that will be changing to mandate the collection.

(Kathy Andree): Okay. And then we're curious if any of the states that presented today, if it's a state mandate if you have a requirement to collect a social security number.

Heather Jones: This is Heather from Missouri. It is not a state mandate. It's included in our LIHEAP Policy and Procedure Manual.

(Kathy Andree): Okay.

Ralph Markus: And this is Ralph from Maryland. Essentially that's the same in Maryland. We don't have a mandate, but we do require that in our Policy Manual.

(Kathy Andree): Okay.

Chuck Anderson: And Chuck from Connecticut. It's part of our annual allocation plan submitted for this Block Grant that's approved by the Legislative Committees of Cognizance. So as far as I know -- I can only speak to LIHEAP -- and they're collected to ensure that fraud doesn't occur.

(Kathy Andree): Okay. And - okay, that's good to know. And then as a state, if your applicants do not provide a social security number do you deny the application?

Heather Jones: For the State of Missouri, no, not necessarily. There are cases where social security numbers are not - be able to be issued like to a young child or a permanent resident who hasn't gotten a social security card. In those situations we assign what's called a pseudo social security number, which is kind of like a placeholder for us. And so those cases are not verified with the Social Security Administration until we obtain a social security number for those members.

(Kathy Andree): Thank you. Okay.

Heather Jones: I don't know. Connecticut, Maryland, what do you guys do if you don't have...

Chuck Anderson: In Connecticut we have an array of (alpha dropdowns) for people who, for instance, have applied for a social security number or don't yet have it, as well as others.

(Kathy Andree): Okay.

Ralph Markus: Yes. And in Maryland, essentially we're doing similar to what's being done in Missouri, creating a pseudo number. We are looking at that particularly in regards to the applicant themselves as opposed to household members where

we're looking at if they do not have a social security number or refuse to provide it that we would deny the application.

(Kathy Andree): Okay. Thank you very much.

Okay, this is our last question. We are curious to understand if the agreement that you have with Social Security Administration, if there's a cost for this service. I don't know if there's - just trying to understand the cost element.

Heather Jones: There is no cost. However, to create the data systems I think all of us would agree there's a cost associated with anytime you change your computer system to do a file transfer between the state and federal government.

(Kathy Andree): Okay. So Social Security Administration doesn't charge you a fee then?

Heather Jones: Not that I'm aware of.

Ralph Markus: No, there's no fee that I'm aware of. I know that there are some systems that are used by private businesses where I believe they charge a fee. But to the best of my knowledge, for government purposes they don't charge a fee.

But I agree with Heather that there is definitely a cost to do programming to get the files matched up.

(Kathy Andree): Yes, yes, absolutely. Okay. Well I appreciate your responses and this is helpful. Thank you.

Coordinator: We have another question form (Blesi).

(Blesi Gundon): Yes, I just wanted to know for Connecticut and Missouri, how do you handle individuals who are here illegally that are applying?

Heather Jones: We ask on our - in the State of Missouri, this Heather. We ask on our application if they're citizens or not. And if they indicate they're not citizens, then they have to document if they're a permanent resident of the United States.

If they don't supply the appropriate documentation that they're permanent residence, then we would deny their application. So we do not include non-citizens in our LIHEAP application process.

And I think they're asking about Connecticut too.

Chuck Anderson: Yes, I'm trying to kind of formulate how to say it.

In Connecticut we don't provide federal benefits to people who - the phrase we use in Connecticut -- and other states may use different phrases -- we use NQA, non-qualified alien.

In those cases, however, if they're part of a household that exists with people with valid social security numbers, they can be - what we do is prorate benefits. Their income would be included but they would not be included as part of the household, which would have the impact of -- in all likelihood -- reducing their benefit. So the benefits are prorated.

If it's a single individual without a valid social security number we cannot provide them Energy Assistance benefits.

(Blesi Gundon): Okay. Thank you.

Coordinator: For any final questions, star 1, please.

Yuliya Rza: Okay. Well if there are no additional questions, this will conclude the Webinar. It has been recorded. So we'll be sending out links to both the video and audio within the next couple weeks, as well as a written transcript.

If there are any additional questions that anyone has for myself, please feel free to contact me. My email address was included in the Webinar announcement. It is yuliya.rza -- Y-U-L-I-Y-A dot R-Z-A-D -- @acf.hhs.gov.

So to conclude, I'd like to thank, again, our three speakers. I very much appreciate your willingness to share your experiences and I'm sure this has been informative for everyone involved.

And thank you very much.

Coordinator: Thank you for participating on today's conference. You may disconnect at this time.

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