The Advocate

NADE

National Association of Disability Examiners

NADE STRONG!

Inside this issue:

<u>President's Address</u>

Greetings NADE members!

I hope this edition of the NADE Advocate finds everyone well. A lot has transpired since the last issue, within and outside of NADE.

NADE's executive team has continued to have quarterly meetings with John Owen, Associate Commissioner, Office of Disability Determinations. And, collaborated with his office to provide an MS Teams remote training opportunity on September 22, 2021. This training was hopefully one of many NADE will be able to offer remotely to its members.

Since the last edition of The Advocate, myself, the Past President, and Legislative Director also participated in the Social Security Advisory Board and Government Accountability Office events as panel members, researching Evidence Collection and SSA Service Delivery. We provided critical perspectives to these agencies that will be considered in their recommendations for new and/or revised Disability Determination program policies.

Finally, the Board held its annual meetings. I would like to extend thanks to the 2020-2021 Board members! They all served you well: Sara Winn, Past President; Tony Scott, Secretary; Patricia Chaplin, Treasurer; Billie Thomas, Southwest Region; Sabrina Sternschuss, Mid-Atlantic Region; and Gina Schwartz, Great Plains Region. The board also welcomed new members: Jennifer Nottingham as President-Elect, Molly Turnbull as Secretary, and Julie Kujath as Treasurer, in addition to several Regional Directors this year: Michelle Wade (MI), Duane Jackson (OK), Nicole Mayberry (WV), and Trish Chaplin (MO).

As you're aware, NADE is a well-respected professional organization, that takes pride in giving back to the local communities served by the DDSs. Some of these events are highlighted in this edition of the Advocate. And, as I write this, many of you are continuing to contribute your time, energy, and other resources to help the less fortunate. With the recent devastation from tornados, floods, fires, and COVID variants taking a toll on many, your charitable actions are in high demand. As these communities rebuild, please keep them in your thoughts and in your deeds. If you need assistance, don't hesitate to reach out to your chapter and regional delegates. Our NADE family is one of the most generous groups I've had the pleasure to be affiliated with.

I look forward to the new year and learning how NADE can better serve you.

Wishing you all a blessed and happy holiday season,

Marjorie E Garcia

president@nade.org

NADE's Strategic Plan
By Terri Klubertanz, Strategic Plan Chair

Strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does and why it does it.   The strategic planning process is really about getting people together to talk about what is important to the organization and then doing something about it. This process allows us to:

  Examine the environment in which NADE exists and operates;
  Explore the factors and trends that affect the way NADE does business and carries out its roles;
  Seek to maintain our constitution and fulfill our mission;
  Frame the strategic issues we must address; and
  Find ways to address our strategic issues.

NADE's strategic plan was designed to provide overarching direction for NADE and to ensure that the organization has the capacity to achieve its goals. The final output includes the goals and strategies to help NADE meet our mission and purpose as outline in Article III of the Preamble to NADE's constitution. The plan focuses on both present objectives as well as future goals with the purpose of building and strengthening our organization, while maintaining NADE's essential purpose.

A mission statement is a definition of the organization's reason for existence – its true purpose. NADE's mission statement is:

  To develop the art and science of disability evaluation;
  To enhance public awareness about disability evaluation; and
  To further professional recognition for disability evaluation practitioners.

A vision statement is a description of what an organization will look like if it achieves its full potential. It conveys a compelling, conceptual image of the desired future for the organization. NADE's vision statement is:
The National Association of Disability Examiners is committed to continually achieve innovative methods for improving the disability programs incorporated under the Social Security Act, enhancing the disability profession for our members, and providing timely, effective and quality public service.
NADE built our strategic plan around NADE's mission and vision statements. Five strategic directions were incorporated into the plan to guide our organization as it moves forward:

  Professionalism;
  Legislative, Regulatory and Judicial Monitoring and Advocacy;
  Organizational Continuity and Service to Members;
  Membership, Fraternity and Recognition; and
  Chapter Development and Services.

When an organization has a strategic plan, it needs to be periodically reviewed and modified to fit both the present status and future goals of the organization. Our strategic plan was recently updated to incorporate changes in committee positions and assigned duties currently in effect. Please take time to review the updated strategic plan which is posted on NADE's website. If you have any additional comments for changes or recommendations for the Board to consider incorporating into the strategic plan, please submit these to the Strategic Plan committee at strategic.plan@nade.org by March 31, 2022.
Thank you.

ODD-NADE TRAINING CONFERENCE 2021

John Owen - News From the Office of Disability Determinations

Although we couldn't host our annual training conference in person this year, your NADE officers arranged an exciting video conference in September. We had more than a hundred attendees, or nearly one-third of our membership at the time! This was a great turn out. Thanks to everyone who attended.

We were honored to have John Owen, Associate Commissioner of the Office of Disability Determinations (ODD), open and close the conference. John started by thanking all DDS chapters for processing CDRs last year. SSA set a goal for 495,000 CDRs cleared, and we did it! CDR clearances ensure funding for the following year, so ODD is very grateful for our hard work.

We also beat our production time targets last year. The target for initial claims was 171 days, but we cleared initial cases at 165 days on average across the country. 152 days was our recon goal, but we cleared initial cases in 147 days, on average.

John made special mention of the states who are providing adjudicatory assistance to other DDS offices around the country:

Arkansas DDS, assisted with 10,330 initials and recons
California DDS assisted with just over 7,000 initials and recons
Alabama helped with approximately 1,300 initials and recons
Florida helped with approximately 1,200 initials and recons
Illinois helped with approximately 1,200 CDRs

In regards to Medical Consultant assistance, the Florida, Arkansas, California, Virginia, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, District of Columbia (DC), and North Carolina DDSs all assisted other DDS by completing over 1,000 medical reviews.

He reported that DDS offices have a 96.7% accuracy rate for decisions nationwide. Colorado, Kansas and Iowa had the highest accuracy rates for initial claims last year. Alaska, Colorado and Vermont had the highest accuracy rates for recon. Alaska's was 100 percent! John pointed out that this information is public and promotes public confidence in the program.

John encouraged us to take advantage of the Request for Policy Consultation (RPC) process to rebut OQR returns you feel may merely be a difference of policy interpretation. These can not only improve your office's accuracy rating, but can provide valuable information about potential improvement in wording for listings and policies. Alabama took advantage of that option 33 times last year, and Texas 32 times! That's great!

Hiring has increased, but John acknowledged that hiring has been difficult across the country with fewer applicants and fewer people accepting positions. Training a large number of new examiners contributed to our inability to meet the clearance goal for claims at the initial level this year. The good news is there's been no reduction in budgets for hiring or overtime. ODD anticipates that overtime will be available throughout the next year.

"Detailed explanations from your administrators about your challenges and needs has been vital to setting the budgets," John said. "Thanks to administrators for that essential data."

Next, John introduced members of his staff with news to share from several departments.

DDS Automation Support Division (Sandra Sturiale)

Sandra talked to analysts about Presumptive Disability (PD) and Failure to Cooperate (FTC) policies.

There's currently a strong emphasis on Presumptive Disability due to the pandemic slowing nearly every aspect of case processing for the claimant. PD can make a real difference to the people we serve. When the information is insufficient to make a final determination, but you're reasonably sure they will qualify, you should PD a claim. It's not appropriate to PD a claim right before you send it to your Medical Consultants for review.

Sandra urged us not to be concerned about whether PD is appropriate. OQR doesn't track analysts' use of PD. PD reversal rates will not impact a state's quality rating.

Regarding FTC, a work group is evaluating the current temporary policies set in place due to the pandemic. They plan to make some of those policies permanent, like telehealth exams and video hearings. However, we can only keep those practices in place while HIPAA standards are relaxed. If those are made permanent, we can continue. They may extend telehealth appointments to include quick physicals and speech/language assessments.

Office of Information Security (Rex Marshall)

Rex updated attendees on PII issues. His office tracks and shares reports of PII loss, and they continue to see DDS offices on their reports. SSA is identifying 'repeat offenders' and sending their names to managers for investigation. Rex emphasized that most PII breaches are not malicious but work-related, from people who are just trying to do their jobs.

For example, one person who worked part-time in the office and part-time at home forwarded a work list from their work email account to their personal email account so they could print it at home. It often happens that disability examiners receive an email from an outside source with PII in it, like the claimant's full name or phone number. When we respond to that email with their original message attached, that constitutes a breach of PII. Before responding

to an email with the original sender's message included, we must delete all PII in that original message. We may create a new email response without their original message as an alternative. Our emails are only secure internally, not externally except with partners like other state agencies which have been added to the secure partner list. Rex urged DDS staff to double check for PII, making sure to scroll all the way to the bottom of the message before we respond to outside sources. Sending PII to a secure source who isn't on the secure partner list is another common issue.

The good news is that there's been a decrease in the number of breaches. When staff started working from home, his office saw about 100 PII breaches per month, nationwide. It's currently down to about 10 per month.

Rex invited questions, and one DDS staffer pointed out that claimants rarely answer their phones anymore. Text is far more popular. She asked whether texting claimants is on the horizon.

OIS understands the need for that capability, Rex said. They've been testing use of text in Vermont and having lots of discussions with staff and developers. In Vermont, initially testing allowed claimants to receive our texts, but they can't text back and must call in. This can be an advantage when we need to have a conversation with the claimant versus sharing limited information.

One staffer from Vermont reported that the ability to send CE appointment information is especially helpful with homeless people, people who live in remote areas who can get a text but not a call, or people who don't get mail regularly. In these trial cases, the analyst can get a summary page that verifies that the message went through. The analyst can cut and paste what was sent and when it was sent into a Case Note. DDS must get permission from the claimant to use texting. DDS can't use texts as part of due process, yet.

IMAGEN (Megan Casey)

Megan introduced IMAGEN as a tool for reviewing evidence. It has a search engine for specific types of data like pathology reports, diagnoses and listing level labs. It recognizes synonyms, acronyms and abbreviations. It can suggest listings for analysis. In a case with thousands of pages, it can scan for whatever you ask it to. It's been rolled out in 17 states so far. Users in those states report that it's helpful. She invited attendees to visit http://oddweb.ssahost.ba.ssa.gov/disability-systems/imagen/default.htm to learn more about IMAGEN. Readers may find more information in a separate article in this issue.

Outlook for Fiscal Year 2022 (Jeremy Palguta)

Jeremy was optimistic for a continuing resolution with hiring authority in place until December. . He noted that in FY 2020, DDS reported 15 applicants per available position with the agency. In FY 2021, that number fell to nine people applying for each job.

Overtime will be available in the first quarter, he said. There should be enough to meet all DDS needs. Workloads are expected to increase, so overtime will be made available to work that increase. There will be a lot of attention on processing time in the coming year. Each agency will have goals to meet in this regard in FY 2022.

At the conclusion of the conference, John Owen thanked NADE for bringing information from our members on a quarterly basis. Our input helps ODD understand the realities DDS staff is dealing with, and that's very valuable information.

DCPS NEWS

Derek Pulliam and Mary Lindauer

Disability professionals across the country expressed a keen interest in updates to the DCPS system and user enhancements. Derek and Mary reported at the ODD-NADE virtual Training Conference that the current roadmap for updates to the system goes through January, 2022. A new roadmap will be published soon for the rest of 2022.

They've striven to capture all the requests from DDS offices and continue to work with administrators to prioritize them. The prioritizing process is as follows: the DCPS development team asked each state to prioritize the top three enhancements, then asked each region to consolidate them. Requests shared across regions became the top priorities. The development team created a finalized list, shared it with all partners for a vote on which ones the team should address first. For the remainder of this calendar year, those top-priority enhancements have been identified. The team will work toward improving collaboration in 2022; the current priority system will stay in place.

Currently, DCPS is running in all states, with only a few sites in a few states left to go. OQR won't be brought on board until all DDS offices are on board. So far, 2.8 million claims have been entered into the system, with 1.6 million fully processed.

Derek Pulliam

Intelligent Medical-Language Analysis GENeration (IMAGEN)

What is IMAGEN?

IMAGEN is a new and potentially transformational way of analyzing and viewing claimant medical and related evidence in the disability electronic folder. When claimant medical and related evidence is received, IMAGEN transforms the evidence in real-time, into machine-readable text that enables enhanced search capabilities and intelligent analysis of medical record content. The medical evidence is analyzed to identify key clinical findings using a robust clinical vocabulary specialized for SSA's disability adjudication needs. This enables the identification of severe medical impairments (step 2 of sequential evaluation) which are then mapped directly to SSA's established diagnosis codes and SSA's Disability Listings (step 3 of sequential evaluation). Specific dated encounters and reports are also identified in the evidence, allowing the user to organize the evidence by section types (inpatient, outpatient), report types (MRI, Pathology, Post-operative, etc.), and chronologically. In upcoming releases, IMAGEN will be able to identify content in the medical record that relates directly to the claimant's physical function and mobility, as used in steps 4 and 5 of the disability sequential evaluation. IMAGEN currently supports Initial and Reconsideration level disability claims. Other adjudicative levels will be supported in the future.   Currently, users can access IMAGEN through a link in the Disability Case Processing System (DCPS) or by creating a browser bookmark or desktop shortcut.

Who is Developing IMAGEN?

IMAGEN is a new, programmatic application being developed under the SSA IT Modernization initiative by a collaborative team of software developers, analysts, disability policy experts, disability adjudicators, and other key stakeholders. Many of those working on IMAGEN have been key contributors to other critical disability automation efforts such Health Information Technology (HIT), Electronic Case Analysis Tool (eCAT), Quick Disability Determination (QDD), Compassionate Allowance (CAL), Electronic Viewer (eView), Electronic Disability Folder (eDIB), DDS legacy system enhancements and more. The IMAGEN team has a deep understanding of the disability adjudication process and the various tools and systems that are used today.   The IMAGEN team works closely with users, including disability adjudicators and medical and psychological consultants in Iowa; San Diego, California; LA Jolla, California; Maine; Mississippi; Louisiana who are utilizing IMAGEN in production to adjudicate cases to define requirements, enhance, and improve the application. In addition, a cadre of representatives that include individuals from a Disability Determination Services (DDS) office in each region, Office of Disability Policy (ODP), Office of Disability Determinations (ODD), Office of Quality Review (OQR), and Office of Hearing Operations (OHO) have access to test cases in IMAGEN to assist in evaluating the application. The IMAGEN team meets with these users on a regular basis and engages in frequent dialog in order to receive continual feedback to inform and define future requirements for IMAGEN.

What are the Features and Advantages of IMAGEN?

🔍 Search

Pre-defined or, "smart searches" allow users to search across the case for clinical information (disease/disorders, medications, signs/symptoms, procedures, anatomic sites, heights and weights, mental status exams) related to claimant allegations, possible medical impairments, and potential evidence of listing criteria, dates, as well as work information. The information is pre-populated based on clinical information found in the MER. Searches automatically include synonyms and all commonly used abbreviations, variations, and related concepts of the searched term(s). Additionally, users can exclude certain sections from search results, such as allergies, family history, medical history, Instructions, and problem lists, for more refined search options.

🔔 Alerting

Alerts provide decision support related to critical clinical content through notifications in IMAGEN that allow users to take immediate action on a disability case. These alerts or notifications include:

- Possible Evidence of a Mental Impairment - Provides users with a notification of the need to evaluate a mental impairment and takes a user directly to this information in the medical evidence.

- Alleged Compassionate Allowance Condition(s) - Navigates users to search results in the medical evidence for Compassionate Allowance Conditions (CAL).

- BMI and weight-for-length alerts (BMI less than 17.50, BMI greater than or equal to 30, and weight-for-length less than 3rd percentile) - Provides users with the capability to calculate a Body Mass Index (BMI) from a height and weight in the MER; graphs height, weight, and BMI over time; and provides alerts for BMI and SSA Medical Listings related to BMI (105.00 and 5.00).

- Possible Medical Impairments (adult cases only) - Provides users with a list of possible medical impairments identified by IMAGEN (step 2) and navigates directly to this information in the medical evidence.

- Possible Evidence of Listing Criteria (adult cases only) - Provides users with a notification when there is possible evidence of criteria from SSA's Listing of Impairments (step 3), including the listing section, and allows users to navigate directly to this information in the medical evidence.

- Possible Out-of-Range Lab Value(s) - Provides users a notification when there is possible evidence of one or more out-of-range lab values when the value is at listing level, and allows users to navigate directly to the lab value in the medical evidence.

Filtering

Search results and content can be filtered by Document, Section Type, Section Date, and Medical Report to more easily find desired content

Export Data

Export IMAGEN data to case analysis tools

Document Organization/ Segmentation

Locate important patient encounters, sections and regions within MER documents quickly (discharge notes, radiology reports, inpatient admissions, emergency room visits, pathology reports, PFTs, cardiac catheterization reports, etc.) and navigate to them using an interactive table of contents for the MER. Sections are dated and where applicable provide additional information such as anatomic site and specialty.

Bookmarking

Users can select a portion of text in the MER and create annotations to save and display for future reference and export to case analysis tools.

What are the Benefits of IMAGEN?

IMAGEN benefits the end user and ultimately the customer, by enhancing the adjudication process, which can result in reduced time for disability determinations. IMAGEN increases the efficiency of navigating to relevant evidence for the end user through a dated and interactive table of contents of important sections and medical reports within the MER. Additionally, IMAGEN correlates clinical information within MER to possible medical impairments and disability impairment listings providing decision support for steps 2 and 3 of the sequential evaluation process. Various alerts allow users to take action immediately upon opening a case in IMAGEN, whether it is to identify and remove evidence that doesn't belong to the claimant, send Spanish MER out for translation, or locate objective clinical findings such as pathology reports.

What is the Current Status of IMAGEN?

IMAGEN is currently being evaluated in eight DDS offices, Iowa, San Diego CA, La Jolla CA, Maine, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Additionally, IMAGEN has a cadre of representatives from multiple components, including ODP, ODD, DDS, OHO, and OQR that provide feedback, which allows the IMAGEN team to continue to refine and improve IMAGEN's user interface, predictive analytics and other

features. Their participation and support of IMAGEN has been invaluable in helping IMAGEN to mature. IMAGEN is being developed using an agile/iterative approach where new features and capabilities are added approximately every three months. The input and feedback from these two early adopter sites and the user cadre has been essential to help prioritize new features and resolve defects. The IMAGEN team is very interested in expanding to additional DDS sites to gain additional user feedback and perspective to allow the IMAGEN application to be further refined and prepared for broader DDS use.

What are the Next Steps for IMAGEN?

IMAGEN plans to continue incremental expansion to DDS sites in FY21. The IMAGEN team will continue to work to eliminate the limitations that create a dual or hybrid, work environment for the DDS adjudicators and to support the primary workloads in the DDS'.

- IMAGEN will focus the remainder of CY21 on adding additional document types to IMAGEN and collaborating with DMA on an enhanced Enterprise Content Viewer (ECV) to begin to address the limitations that require users to utilize both IMAGEN and DMA to adjudicate a disability claim.

- IMAGEN is working with DCPS to provide additional integration points with the case analysis tool In FY22.

- IMAGEN will continue to provide technical enhancements, improvements to the user interface, sectioning, and predictive analytics for steps 2 and 3 of sequential evaluation, including the addition of predictions for Disabled Child (DC) cases

- Work has begun on the identification of functional terminology, such as physical function and mobility as well as work related content in MER to begin supporting steps 4 and 5 of sequential evaluation.

- The IMAGEN team will continue its collaboration with the National Institute of Health (NIH) on functional terminology in FY21.

- Other efforts surrounding steps 4 and 5 will begin pending any changes in vocational policy.

- IMAGEN plans to begin to support OQR and OHO use cases in FY22.

NADE Board Restructuring

Jennifer Nottingham

NADE is exploring restructuring its Board by reducing the number of regional directors. This will be a significant change. We want our members to be aware of this potential change and the reasons it's needed. A vote before the full NADE membership is required before any changes can occur. Voting can be conducted electronically or at a NADE national conference.

NADE currently has seven regional directors. Our regions currently do not align with SSA's designated regions. Membership in each region varies greatly. While the size of the regions fluctuates over the years, some regions have very few members each year. Small regions have particular difficulty recruiting members to fill leadership and committee positions, and for the very important Regional Director position.

NADE's primary source of income is membership dues. Travel expenses are NADE's biggest expenditure. Historically NADE has paid for the Board to travel to the national conference and the mid-year Board meeting. NADE's membership has continued to decrease over the past decade; funding seven board members is no longer sustainable. While the ideal solution would be to expand our membership, our attempts have not been successful, especially in the smaller regions.

Decreasing the number of NADE Regional Director positions would not only help with budget concerns, it will help ensure that Board members who apply are truly interested in serving on the Board. We need Board members who will dedicate time to work with the chapters, share information with their chapters, and help to recruit new members. At this time, we don't know how chapters will be divided by region. We 're currently focusing on educating the membership of this plan and determining how many regions there should be.

We sent a survey to members to get their input on restructuring the NADE board. There were 111 responses including responses from each region. The survey gave three options: decreasing the Board to four regions, five regions, or "other." 57 respondents favored four regions, 43 respondents chose five regions and 11 respondents selected "other."

We strive to keep our members informed. Please reach out to your regional director if you have any questions or suggestions.

NADE

National Association of Disability Examiners

Did you know that

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GADE REPRESENTS IN PINK

GADE members in Georgia honored Breast Cancer Awareness Month by wearing pink on Thursdays in October. It hasn't been easy to find ways to participate in fun and important awareness activities with staff split between the office and home, but GADE found a way! They solicited photos from their staff and published a collage each week.
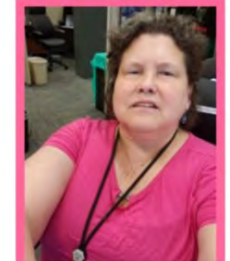
SoDADE Goes The Extra Mile, Helps Foster a Merry Christmas

Our South Dakota chapter partnered this December with Sharing Christmas Sioux Falls, Child Protection Services and Center of Hope to collect gifts for local children in foster care from birth to age 18. They raised nearly $450 and used that money to buy gifts galore!

In November, SoDADE members participated in Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week by participating in the fifth annual "Walk a Mile in My Shoes" event for St. Francis House. St. Francis House is an agency that helps homeless people meet their basic needs, access community resources and find transitional housing.

Many guests to the shelter arrive with backpacks that contain all their possessions and weigh a mere 15 lbs. Participants in the event filled a new or gently used backpack with 15 lbs. of essential items like hats, gloves, deodorant, shampoo, canned food and razors. They carried each backpack one mile, from the LSS-SD Center for New Americans, an agency in Sioux Falls that helps refugees become self-sufficient, to St. Francis House where it was left as a donation.

Kaitlin Roberts, Lisa Yax and Victoria McGawley

MADE Springfield Adopts Division Street

Springfield, Missouri DDS recently moved to a brand new building, and as part of their efforts to give back to their new community, MADE's Springfield chapter adopted a road!

MADE's Chapter President Susie Henry contacted the City of Springfield's Adopt a Street Project and learned that the half mile stretch of Division Street in front of their office was available for adoption.

"Division Street is a very busy road with a lot of traffic," Susie said. "It looks clean when driving past, but walking down the street is another story. There's a lot of trash!"

"We're committed to clean up the street at least three times per year," she said. "Our first clean-up was at the end of June and boiling hot. We were underprepared, but we picked up a lot of plastic and glass bottles, a ton of trash and even a terrifying bag of needles! The street looked really pretty afterward, and it was great socially-distant bonding time with our MADE members. We plan to do our next clean-up on a cooler evening, with more trash bags, thicker gloves and more grabbers."

WVADE Gives Big to The Salvation Army

September 11, 2021 marked United Way's 20th annual Day of Caring, a national day of service dedicated to honoring those who lost their lives on 09/11. In that spirit, Nicole Mayberry, Secretary of WVADE in Charleston, West Virginia spearheaded a donation drive for the Salvation Army at her DDS office, placing donation boxes at the entrance to every floor. Although almost 75% of their staff still works from home, they donated generously. WVADE is delighted to serve their community again.

National Disability Professionals Week 2021

June and July are well behind us, but January's Annual Membership Drive is just around the corner! Here are some highlights from NDPW 2021, a great advertisement for the fun and education to be had as a member of NADE!
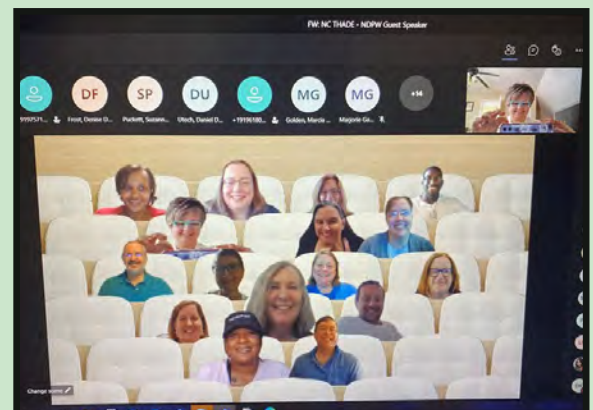

Missouri

Picnic, Oregon

Scavenger Hunt, North Carolina

Missouri

Axe throwing, Ohio

Lunch & Learn, North Carolina

FRAUDBUSTERS

from the Office of the Inspector General

Edward Douglas Cornman, 49, of Menominee, Michigan, was sentenced to 18 months in prison in December for theft of government funds. He was also ordered to pay $297,768.31 in restitution. Chief U.S. District Judge Robert J. Jonker imposed the sentence.

Cornman pleaded guilty in June 2021 to lying about his work history and assets to obtain Medicaid benefits. From 2010 to 2019, Cornman failed to disclose his assets and work activities to the Social Security Administration. As a result, he improperly received Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, and other benefits. Over the approximately ten-year period, Cornman received $297,768.31 in benefits from various agencies he was not entitled to receive.

U.S. Attorney Andrew Birge said, "Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income are programs aimed at the neediest in our society. Protecting those programs from abuse is one of our most important missions. My office will continue to vigorously prosecute those who abuse federally funded programs and benefits."

In November, Senior U.S. District Judge William C. Griesbach sentenced Appleton resident **John P. Fischer** (age: 63) to 18 months' imprisonment and three years' supervised release after Fischer pled guilty to Supplemental Security Income ("SSI") Fraud, in violation of Title 42, United States Code, Section 1383a(a)(3)(A).

From 2009 to 2017, Fischer fraudulently received over $73,500 in federal and state SSI benefits by knowingly concealing numerous resources from the Social Security Administration ("SSA"). SSI is a nationwide welfare program for the blind, disabled, and those over 65 years of age who have little to no income and no more than $2,000 in resources. SSI is funded by general tax revenues, unlike SSA pensions and SSDI that are funded by payroll taxes.

Fischer filed for SSI claiming that he met all criteria, but in fact, he had bank accounts, investment accounts, and vehicles that put him well above the $2,000 limit. Among them was a Roth IRA worth more than $42,000 that Fischer knowingly concealed from the SSA and secretly cashed out. Fischer also paid over $48,000 for two GMC Acadia SUVs without notifying the SSA that he had the money or the vehicles. In addition, Fischer's scheme involved concealing his accounts and vehicles under the guise of two different "churches," which were simply a front to hide his assets.

At sentencing, Judge Griesbach rejected Fischer's request for probation and stressed that Fischer's serious and long-standing criminal conduct warranted substantial prison time for purposes of punishment, deterring others from committing fraud, and reinforcing the public's confidence in social-safety-net programs like SSI. The court also ordered Fischer to pay full restitution for his crime. SSI Fraud is a felony punishable by up to five years' imprisonment, a $250,000 fine, and three years' supervised release.

Acting U.S. Attorney Bridget M. Brennan announced that on Wednesday, Nov. 3, Judge J. Philip Calabrese sentenced **Anthony D. Wilson**, 35, of Warren, Ohio, to a three-year term of probation after Wilson pleaded guilty in June of 2021 to threatening an official with the Social Security Administration.

"Public servants should never be faced with threats of physical violence or intimidation in the course of their employment," said Acting U.S. Attorney Bridget M. Brennan. "The Social Security Administration employees threatened by Mr. Wilson are commended for the prompt and appropriate response to the threats made against them."

"Mr. Wilson's violent threats to murder a DDS employee who was performing their official duties are intolerable," said Gail S. Ennis, Inspector General for the Social Security Administration. "The safety of SSA employees and contractors is one of our highest priorities, and we will continue to hold accountable those who jeopardize or attempt to endanger their safety. I thank our law enforcement partners for their efforts in this investigation and the U.S. Attorney's Office for prosecuting this case."

According to court documents, in January of 2020, the Social Security Administration (SSA) began a review of the disability status of Wilson to ensure he remained eligible to receive benefits, which required Wilson to undergo medical examinations. At the conclusion of this review, the SSA determined that Wilson was not disabled and discontinued his benefits. Wilson later appealed this decision and, in order to consider the appeal, the SSA required Wilson to undergo further medical examinations and a Claims Adjudicator with the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, Disability Determination Services, a contractor for the SSA, was assigned to the case.

On or about March 20 and March 21, 2021, Wilson left threatening voicemail messages on the work phone of the adjudicator threatening bodily harm to the adjudicator and other employees. Wilson made these threats in retaliation to the adjudicator's work on Wilson's pending case before the Social Security Administration.
As part of the investigation, federal agents obtained a copy of Wilson's criminal history and discovered a number of prior arrests for making threatening statements and, in one instance, threatening to harm a police officer.