

**CONCLUSION:** MDRS DDS and SSA processing times began increasing in FFY 2020 and continued through FFY 2024 as a state and national backlog developed. Since then, MDRS DDS reduced its case backlog from 26,648 cases to below 10,000 cases as of August 2025. Although processing times have decreased, total mean processing time (including staging) remained elevated, averaging 272 days as of August 2025. Staffing losses, including the loss of 122 disability examiners over five years, were the primary cause of increased processing times at the state level.



## BACKGROUND

The Social Security Administration (SSA) and state Disability Determination Services (MDRS DDS) offices share responsibility for initial disability determination decisions and assessing continued eligibility.

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) provides benefits to people who have developed a disability or who are blind and who are insured by workers' contributions to the Social Security trust fund. The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program makes cash payments to people who are aged, blind, or have developed a disability (including children) and who have limited income and resources.

When claimants apply for SSDI and/or SSI benefits, SSA determines whether the claimants meet nonmedical requirements. Then, the state DDS offices make medical determinations on eligibility status. SSA then notifies the applicant of approval or denial, and if approved, takes steps to commence payments to the new beneficiary.

State DDS offices are 100% federally funded. While DDS employees are subject to SSA rules, these employees are considered state employees with state benefits and pay set by the state (i.e., the Mississippi State Personnel Board).

**SCOPE and PURPOSE:** After receiving a complaint concerning the long processing times for making determinations for SSDI and SSI claims, PEER reviewed MDRS DDS's efforts to process initial cases, reconsideration cases (first line of appeal), and Continuing Disability Review (CDR) cases and issues that led to the backlog.

**DDS Data Limitations:** SSA and MDRS DDS primarily utilize two tools to track cases and to assess performance: the national Disability Case Processing System (DCPS) and MicroStrategy.

- Early 2020s – SSA mandated each state DDS transition from legacy state case processing systems to the DCPS.
- MicroStrategy – an AI-based tool that pulls data from the DCPS and other sources to produce metrics to track DDS outputs and performance.

**SSA denied PEER's data request due to Social Security Personally Identifiable Information (PII) restrictions. Therefore:**

1. PEER could not test the accuracy of the MicroStrategy reports MDRS DDS produced, in conjunction with SSA.
2. PEER also could not further assess the DDS determination process to determine and/or verify the causes of the delay and case backlog.

**MDRS DDS's Ability to Keep Up with its Caseload:** From FFY 2021 to FFY 2024, MDRS DDS processed 23,000 fewer cases than it received, despite its caseload declining 13,000 cases over the same period. This created a backlog of cases to process, extending processing times as cases set in staging waiting to be worked. Through Week 34 of FFY 2025, MDRS DDS processed more than 11,000 cases than it received. However, a case backlog remains.

**MDRS DDS Cases Received versus Cases Processed, FFY 2020 to FFY 2025**

Federal Fiscal Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (thru Week 34)	Total
<b>Cases Received</b>	58,736	58,160	56,964	51,515	45,111	29,184	<b>299,670</b>
<b>Cases Processed</b>	60,374	50,619	51,693	40,621	45,708	40,627	<b>289,642</b>
<b>Net</b>	1,638	-7,541	-5,271	-10,894	597	11,443	<b>-10,028</b>

## MDRS DDS Performance

- **MDRS DDS versus the national average from FFY 2016 to FFY 2024:**
  - In Mississippi, average processing time increased from 105 days for both SSDI and SSI cases to 297 days for SSDI cases and 353 days for SSI cases.
  - By comparison, average processing time nationally increased from an average of 110 days for SSDI cases and 120 days for SSI cases in FFY 2020 to 168 days for SSDI and 202 days for SSI cases in FFY 2024.

### Improvement in FFY 2025 as the Backlog Reduced

- Cases completed in August 2025 spent 32 days less waiting to be assigned to an examiner than cases completed in August 2024.
- MDRS DDS assigned user mean processing time (i.e., the time an examiner is assigned to the case), decreased from 166.3 days in October 2023 to 124.6 days in August 2025, an improvement of 40 days per case.
- Total mean processing time, including staging, remained elevated, averaging 272 days as of August 2025.

#### MDRS DDS Staff Attrition

MDRS Lost 122 disability examiners over five years.

- This was the primary cause of increased processing times.
- Caseload increased while salary remained lower than other states.
- SSA hiring restrictions – because SSA allocates hires instead of PINs, MDRS DDS cannot replace a departed person unless a hire is available.
  - Legislative elimination of vacant DDS PINs can delay or prevent MDRS DDS from filling positions when SSA authorizes hires.

#### Other Challenges Impacting Operations

- Medical record review workload increased due to transition to electronic medical records.
- Wait times increased to obtain medical records.
- Difficulty in recruiting and retaining medical consultants and consultative examiners.
  - It takes 117 days to complete consultative exam process in Mississippi, which is 30 days longer than next closest southeast state.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Due to SSA's denial of PEER's data request seeking to obtain data to identify the causes and extent of delays in the state processing SSDI and SSI cases, the PEER Committee should forward a copy of this report to Mississippi's Congressional delegation and request that the SSA's Office of the General Counsel revisit its decision denying PEER access to the requested data.
2. MDRS DDS should, in coordination with SSA, seek to develop finely detailed performance data analytic capabilities for MicroStrategy at both the individual level and aggregate level by increasing the sophistication of internal database access (e.g., either custom built, prewritten queries or the ability to write their own queries).
3. MDRS DDS should periodically update the Legislature on any progress made toward reducing processing times or any future changes in staffing or funding that might adversely impact MDRS DDS's efforts to reduce processing times. This would permit an internal oversight entity (e.g., MDRS's Office of Program Integrity) to assess the validity of the data without violating SSA's PII restrictions.
4. MDRS DDS should review its method for assigning cases, including the number and type of cases assigned to each examiner level and the maximum caseload for each examiner level.
5. Given the decline in the number of disability examiners, MDRS DDS should consider reevaluating the number of team leads and case consultants.
6. The Legislative Budget Office should consider pausing elimination of Vacant PINs (Position Identification Number) assigned to MDRS DDS, pending verification with MDRS DDS that they do not intend to fill the PINs.



A Review of Disability Determination Services at the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services  
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For more information, contact: (601) 359-1226 | P.O. Box 1204, Jackson, MS 39215-1204  
Representative Kevin Felsher | James F. (Ted) Booth, Executive Director