

12067

BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL

Report To The Congress

OF THE UNITED STATES

Identifying Boarding Homes Housing The Needy Aged, Blind, And Disabled: A Major Step Toward Resolving A National Problem

Although the plight of many needy aged, blind, and disabled persons living in boarding homes has received national attention, the question remains: How can the location of these homes housing numerous Supplemental Security Income recipients be identified?

GAO developed a computerized data retrieval process which, when applied to SSI payment records, would identify addresses of boarding homes where SSI checks were being mailed. HEW has agreed to assist in the identification effort.

The report makes several recommendations to the Secretary of HEW to help the States identify boarding homes and enforce required standards.



110884-
-007833

HRD-80-17
NOVEMBER 19, 1979



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

B-164031(4)

To the President of the Senate and the
Speaker of the House of Representatives

This report discusses the identification of boarding homes where the needy aged, blind, and disabled reside. It also discusses steps that HEW can take to implement section 1616(e) of the Social Security Act.

On April 25, 1979, we testified before the Subcommittee on Health and Long-term Care, House Select Committee on Aging, on the interim results of this review. Because of the broad interest in the subject of boarding homes, we are issuing our report to the Congress.

We are sending copies of this report to the Director, Office of Management and Budget, and the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert A. Steets".

Comptroller General
of the United States

COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S
REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

IDENTIFYING BOARDING HOMES
HOUSING THE NEEDY AGED,
BLIND, AND DISABLED: A
MAJOR STEP TOWARD RESOLVING
A NATIONAL PROBLEM

D I G E S T

Countless needy aged, blind, and disabled persons receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) live in boarding homes. Many are abused and exploited by unscrupulous operators, yet State and local licensing inspection officials do not know the location of these homes. This report shows how they can be identified. IT

In 1976, the Congress enacted section 1616(e) of the Social Security Act, which required the States to establish, maintain, and ensure enforcement of standards for facilities, such as boarding homes, in which significant numbers of Supplemental Security Income recipients reside or are likely to reside. (See p. 3.) ✓

GAO developed a computerized data retrieval process to apply to Social Security Administration records to identify addresses to which SSI checks are sent each month. GAO tested the usefulness of this process in Baltimore, Maryland, and Camden County, New Jersey, where it visited 38 boarding homes. Fifteen of these homes were unlicensed and either were operating illegally or were not required to have a State or local license. Ten of them were unknown to authorities. (See pp. 6 and 7.) ABC 26

About 90 percent of the disabled boarding home residents were either mentally impaired or retarded--persons highly susceptible to abuse and exploitation. During visits GAO noted several unsafe and unsanitary conditions--a rotted-out fire escape, filthy living conditions, and an elderly and disoriented resident locked in a second floor room. (See pp. 8 to 10.)

HEW officials fully concurred with GAO's recommendations and promised immediate action. (See p. 14.)

C o n t e n t s

	<u>Page</u>
DIGEST	i
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Deinstitutionalization	1
The Supplemental Security Income program	2
Scope of review	4
2 SOCIAL SECURITY RECORDS CAN HELP STATES IDENTIFY BOARDING HOMES HOUSING SSI RECIPIENTS	6
Identifying boarding homes	6
Boarding home conditions	8
Boarding home residents	10
Boarding home operators	11
A legal question and technical barriers concerning States' use of SSA records to identify and locate boarding homes housing SSI recipients	11
Conclusions	13
Recommendations to the Secretary of HEW	13
Agency comments	14
APPENDIX	
I Summary of boarding home resident responses to interview questions	15
II Summary of boarding home operator responses to interview questions	16
<u>ABBREVIATIONS</u>	
GAO	General Accounting Office
HEW	Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
SDX	State Data Exchange
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSI	Supplemental Security Income

*FD Boarding homes
Housing for the elderly
rental housing
Housing for the
handicapped
elderly*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many problems of needy aged, blind, and disabled persons residing in boarding homes have received national publicity as the subject of various studies, investigations, and newspaper articles. These sources have repeatedly described cases of boarding home tragedies and the abuse and exploitation of residents by unscrupulous home operators. Identifying and locating these boarding homes has been cited as a major problem. Some of these sources are listed below.

- Reports on hearings held by the House Select Committee on Aging: "The National Crisis in Adult Care Homes" (June 1977) and "Adult Boarding Homes" (Feb. 1978).
- New Jersey State Commission of Investigation's "Report on Abuses and Irregularities in New Jersey's Boarding Home Industry" (Nov. 1978).
- Report of the New York State Moreland Act Commission on Nursing Homes and Residential Facilities: "Long Term Care Regulation: Past Lapses, Future Prospects" (Apr. 1976).
- A Temple University study: "Boarding Homes in Philadelphia" (Dec. 1977).
- The HEW Secretary's "Boarding Homes Assessment" (June 1979).
- Many newspaper articles, as early as 1975, describing tragedies and inadequate care for boarding home residents.

Most of these sources attribute much of the recent growth in the number of boarding homes to two programs--deinstitutionalization and Supplemental Security Income.

DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION

In 1963, the Government embarked on a bold new approach to improve the care and treatment of mentally disabled and retarded persons. Referred to as "deinstitutionalization," it was based on the principle that mentally disabled and retarded persons are entitled to live as normally and independently as possible in the least restrictive environment. The

an individual and \$312.30 for a couple) has enabled many of them to be released from institutions. This, in turn, has increased the demand for low-cost group living arrangements, such as boarding homes.

The SSI program, administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA), replaced the former State-administered programs of Old-Age Assistance, Aid to the Blind, and Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disabled. Some States supplement the Federal SSI benefit with their own funds and either administer supplementary payments themselves or contract for Federal administration.

The size of the SSI program as of December 1978 is shown in the following table.

<u>Reason for eligibility</u>	<u>Number of persons</u>	<u>Federally administered monthly payments</u>		
		<u>Total</u>	<u>Federal funds</u>	<u>State funds (note a)</u>
————(millions)————				
Aged	1,967,900	\$197.6	\$144.4	\$ 53.2
Blind	<u>b/77,135</u>	12.7	9.0	3.7
Disabled	<u>c/2,171,890</u>	<u>336.3</u>	<u>267.0</u>	<u>69.3</u>
Total	<u>4,216,925</u>	<u>\$546.6</u>	<u>\$420.4</u>	<u>\$126.2</u>

a/Excludes payments for State-administered funds.

b/Includes about 25,000 persons age 65 and over.

c/Includes about 311,000 persons age 65 and over.

Federal effort to regulate boarding homes where SSI recipients reside

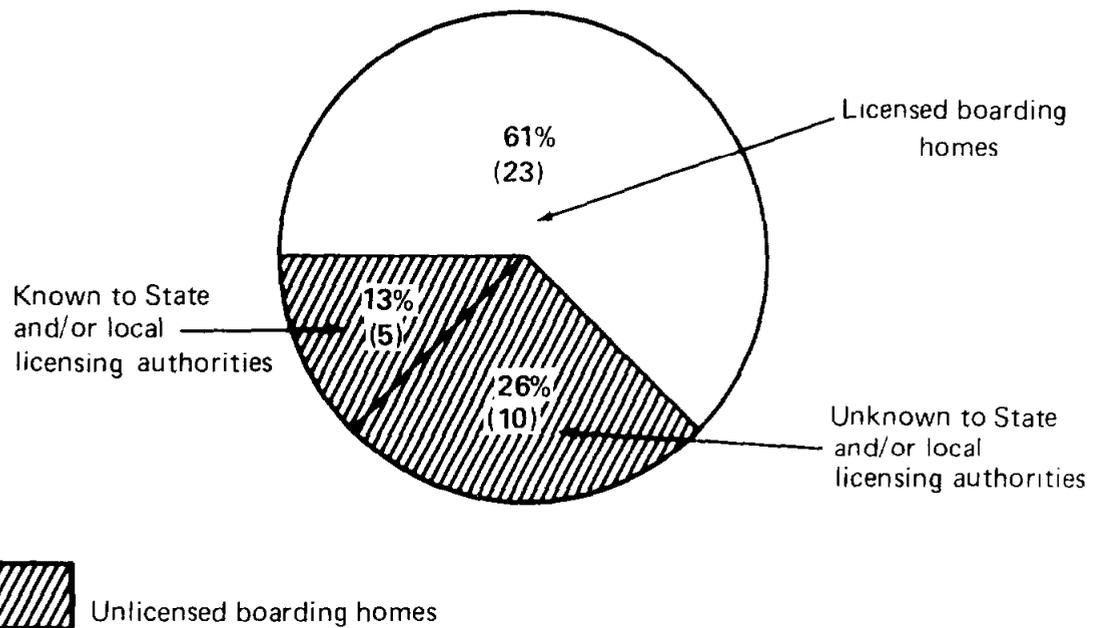
The Congress has made one effort to regulate boarding homes where SSI recipients reside. On October 20, 1976, it enacted section 505(d) (Keys Amendment) of Public Law 94-566, which became section 1616(e) of the Social Security Act. Section 1616(e) requires States to establish, maintain, and ensure enforcement of standards for any category of institutions, foster homes, or group living arrangements

The principal agencies involved in our review were SSA; the New Jersey Departments of Human Services, Health, and Community Affairs; the Camden County Welfare Agency; the Maryland Departments of Human Resources and Health and Mental Hygiene; and the Baltimore City Departments of Health, Social Services, and Housing and Community Development. We also did some work at SSA district offices and interviewed key officials of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW).

the addresses--24 in Baltimore and 14 in Camden County-- were in fact boarding homes. The other 36 addresses either did not meet our definition of a boarding home or were not accessible to us. 1/

Of the 38 boarding homes in Baltimore and Camden County, 15 (39 percent) were unlicensed--9 were operating illegally without the required license, and 6 were not required to be licensed under State or local law. Also, of these 15 boarding homes, 10 were totally unknown to licensing authorities. The following chart summarizes our findings.

38 BOARDING HOMES



1/Small apartment buildings, cooperative living arrangements, or family relationships (33 addresses). Unable to gain access--no determination made (3 addresses).

--SSA records showed a home as having one blind and four disabled SSI recipients. However, the owner said only three recipients were still residing there on the day of our visit. One recipient was disabled and needed a walker to get around. He lived on the third floor and sometimes did not get enough to eat because he could not move fast enough to get downstairs in time for meals. In the event of fire, he would probably perish.

--SSA records showed one home had 23 disabled and 2 aged SSI recipients. It was actually several connecting row homes and was licensed by the city as a multifamily dwelling. Local authorities were aware that it was operated as a halfway house for alcoholics. Part of the home had been closed by the city health department a few months earlier as being unfit for human habitation. The part remaining open at the time of our visit contained many sanitation violations. The city health inspector said that conditions had not improved since the last inspection. Later, the entire home was closed.

Camden County, New Jersey

We visited 14 boarding homes--10 licensed and 4 unlicensed. Three of the unlicensed homes were unknown to State or local licensing authorities. Three homes--two licensed and one unlicensed--were cited by the State inspector who accompanied us for providing either personal services for which they were not licensed or for housing residents who required a higher level of protective care.

Following are examples of SSI recipients living in unsafe or unsanitary facilities and in situations indicating a need for protective oversight.

--SSA records showed that one home housed three aged SSI recipients. On the day of our visit only one of these recipients still resided in the home, but three other SSI recipients had moved in. This home was unknown to State or local authorities. Accompanying us was a State nurse-inspector, who found an elderly and disoriented resident in a second floor bedroom locked from the outside with a hook and eye lock. In the event of fire, she would probably perish. The nurse ordered the operator to immediately transfer this resident to a licensed facility.

money, generally less than \$30 per month. The more significant responses by the boarding home residents are summarized in appendix I.

BOARDING HOME OPERATORS

We were able to interview the boarding home operator at 35 of the 38 boarding homes we visited. Our interviews addressed the operators' characteristics and background, services and supervision provided, sources of referrals, relationships with public agencies, types of chores done by residents, availability of medical and emergency services, and types of assistance operators felt they would need to provide better services.

Almost half (17) of the operators said they had some prior experience in a health-related occupation (for example, registered nurse, practical nurse, or nurses' aid). The occupational experience of the other operators was unrelated to their present job. About one-third of the operators said they had received specialized training in diet and nutrition, counseling services, behavioral training, medication and treatment services, or first aid.

Over half of the operators said they receive many residents from State mental hospitals. About half said their residents receive visits from social workers; however, less than 20 percent routinely referred residents to social services agencies. Most of the operators said they provided 24-hour supervision to the residents. Nearly all said medical and emergency services were readily available, with about 60 percent citing on-call physicians or hospitals as the sources.

The more significant responses by the boarding home operators are summarized in appendix II.

A LEGAL QUESTION AND TECHNICAL BARRIERS CONCERNING STATES' USE OF SSA RECORDS TO IDENTIFY AND LOCATE BOARDING HOMES HOUSING SSI RECIPIENTS

We established that the information contained in SSA's SDX file (principally names and addresses) can be used to identify boarding homes housing SSI recipients. Initially, SSA was reluctant to authorize the use of these names and addresses by the States without first requiring them to follow certain procedures that might be dictated by the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. 552a). In September 1979, HEW determined that, for the purpose of identifying boarding homes, SSA could authorize States to use information in the SDX file pursuant to their requests under the Freedom of

whereby potential boarding homes can be identified. The lack of such capability would severely limit the State's ability to enforce its own boarding home standards established in accordance with section 1616(e), particularly with respect to homes that are presently unlicensed and unknown to State or local authorities. Consequently, we gave SSA the data retrieval process and basic logic we used to identify boarding homes in our review, and SSA has, in turn, agreed to help States process the SDX data into a usable format.

CONCLUSIONS

The SDX file, properly organized, can give the States the information they need to locate boarding homes housing significant numbers of SSI recipients. States will then have taken the first step toward enforcing the boarding home standards required by section 1616(e) of the Social Security Act.

Even when the SDX file is available for the States to use in enforcing the standards required by section 1616(e), many States may lack the computer or programing capability to manipulate the data into a usable format for identifying boarding homes. This could hamper a State's efforts to bring its unlicensed and unknown boarding homes into compliance with the law.

We recognize that identifying boarding homes with SSI recipients is only the first step toward resolving the problem. The first round of inspections under section 1616(e) will undoubtedly reveal many other issues that will have to be addressed before our Nation can be assured that the needy aged, blind, and disabled are living in decent, safe, and sanitary boarding homes.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SECRETARY OF HEW

We recommend that the Secretary of HEW:

- Notify each State of the decision that information in the SDX file may be used to assist in identifying boarding homes.
- Provide computer and programing assistance to any State that lacks the capability to manipulate the SDX file to produce data in a format usable for identifying potential boarding homes.

SUMMARY OF BOARDING HOME RESIDENT
RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(111 RESIDENTS)

- 84 percent were aware that their checks were coming from SSA. (110 responses)
- 54 percent were not aware of the amount of payments received from SSA. (111 responses)
- 68 percent said they endorsed their SSI checks over to the boarding home operator. (107 responses)
- 90 percent of those who endorsed their checks over to the boarding home operator said they received spending money. 56 percent of these received less than \$30 per month. (71 responses)
- 44 percent were aware of the monthly rental costs. (108 responses)
- 74 percent said they did not receive any social services. (107 responses)
- 75 percent expressed no interest in receiving social services. (72 responses)
- 69 percent resided in their present home 5 years or less. (111 responses)
- 76 percent were on prescribed medication, with 46 percent of these self-administered. (111 responses)
- 83 percent said they received services from the boarding home operator, principally laundry (80 percent). (108 responses)
- More than 90 percent said they received three meals a day. (110 responses)
- 73 percent said that they were required to perform chores, principally dusting and cleaning (70 percent). (102 responses)

Note: All residents interviewed did not, or could not, respond to every question. The percentages are based on the number of responses--shown parenthetically--received to each question. We did not assess the competency of residents to respond to our questions.

AVAILABILITY OF MEDICAL
AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

--33 said that medical and emergency services were readily available.

--As the source of medical or emergency services, 21 cited physicians on call and 23 cited nearby hospitals.

NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF
BOARDING HOME OPERATORS

--The operators did not express any significant needs or concerns. Twenty cited the need for more money, but other needs or concerns were minimal or insignificant.

(105055)

Single copies of GAO reports are available free of charge. Requests (except by Members of Congress) for additional quantities should be accompanied by payment of \$1.00 per copy.

Requests for single copies (without charge) should be sent to:

U.S. General Accounting Office
Distribution Section, Room 1518
441 G Street, NW.
Washington, DC 20548

Requests for multiple copies should be sent with checks or money orders to:

U.S. General Accounting Office
Distribution Section
P.O. Box 1020
Washington, DC 20013

Checks or money orders should be made payable to the U.S. General Accounting Office. NOTE: Stamps or Superintendent of Documents coupons will not be accepted.

PLEASE DO NOT SEND CASH

To expedite filling your order, use the report number and date in the lower right corner of the front cover.

GAO reports are now available on microfiche. If such copies will meet your needs, be sure to specify that you want microfiche copies.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

**UNITED STATES
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548**

**OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300**

**POSTAGE AND FEES PAID
U. S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE**



THIRD CLASS

SUMMARY OF BOARDING HOME OPERATORRESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS(35 OPERATORS)SOURCES OF REFERRALS

--18 responded that State mental hospitals were a primary referral source for residents. Other principal referral sources cited were general hospitals, churches, and friends.

--Only three indicated referrals being made by mental health centers.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PUBLIC AGENCIES

--18 said that residents receive visits from welfare or social workers.

--Only six said they routinely referred residents to social service agencies for assistance.

SERVICES AND SUPERVISION
PROVIDED TO RESIDENTS

--22 resided in the boarding home.

--29 said they provided 24-hour supervision to the residents.

--The most frequently provided service was laundry (74 percent). About 50 percent said they provided transportation, cleaning, shopping, or assistance with medications.

CHORES PERFORMED BY RESIDENTS

--The most frequently cited chore performed by the residents was cleaning their own room (57 percent), followed by dusting and light housekeeping (40 percent) and washing dishes (31 percent).

--Only 5 of 32 operators who said residents performed chores paid the residents. Payments were generally token.

--Monitor States' efforts to enforce the standards established under section 1616(e) and help resolve problems encountered.

AGENCY COMMENTS

We met with HEW officials and obtained their comments to a draft of this report. They fully concurred with and agreed to take immediate action to implement each of our recommendations.

Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552). Still, many States may need assistance in overcoming the technical problems involved in manipulating the SDX file to identify boarding homes.

Legal question

The Privacy Act of 1974 curtails the disclosure of certain information relating to individuals. Federal agencies generally cannot release personally identifiable information without the individuals' prior written consent, except as permitted by the act. One basis for release without consent is where the release of information has been approved for "routine use" (that is, its use is consistent with the purpose for which the records were collected). In the past, SSA generally has prohibited States from using the SDX file to locate boarding homes, even for the purpose of enforcing the standards that they were required to establish under section 1616(e), because such a use had not been established as a routine use.

During our review, we discussed with SSA officials the adverse effects of the limitation placed on the States' use of the SDX file. They suggested that the States might request permission from SSA to use the SDX file under the Freedom of Information Act. The Privacy Act permits disclosure of identifiable information without written consent where such disclosure is required by the Freedom of Information Act. This suggestion was conveyed to Maryland and New Jersey officials. Both States later requested and were granted permission to use the SDX file, on a one-time only basis, to conduct a reform program of the boarding home industry.

After prolonged consideration of this matter within HEW, attorneys in the HEW Office of General Counsel, in September 1979, advised SSA that authorization to use the SDX information may be granted pursuant to requests from the States under the Freedom of Information Act.

The HEW attorneys also noted that, for the Secretary to carry out her responsibilities under section 1616(e) of the Social Security Act, States would have to request and be granted permission to use these records.

The HEW attorneys offered to help develop an appropriate form for States to use in requesting this information.

Technical barriers

Many States may not have the equipment or technical skills required to manipulate the SDX file into a format

--Two separate housing units, represented by a single address, were illegally operating as sheltered care homes. They were providing services without the required State licenses. Both homes had been previously cited by the State department of health for the same offense.

BOARDING HOME RESIDENTS

The following table contains data on the 450 SSI recipients who were residing in the 38 boarding homes we visited.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Boarding homes</u>	<u>SSI recipients-- type of eligibility</u>			<u>Total</u>
		<u>Aged</u>	<u>Blind</u>	<u>Disabled</u>	
Baltimore, Maryland	24	74	5	154	233
Camden County, New Jersey	<u>14</u>	<u>102</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>113</u>	<u>217</u>
Total	<u>38</u>	<u>176</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>267</u>	<u>450</u>

We examined the SSA files for 147 of the 267 disabled SSI recipients. There was a very high incidence of mental impairments and retardation: about 90 percent of the recipients were in these categories. Many of these residents had previously been institutionalized.

We interviewed 111 residents--34 aged, 3 blind, and 74 disabled--who resided in the 38 boarding homes. Our informal interviews generally covered such topics as services and assistance provided by social service agencies, frequency and quality of meals, availability of medical services, rental rates charged, and amount of personal allowances. We selected residents to interview based on their availability at the time of our visit and their willingness and ability to answer our questions. Some residents were obviously unable to comprehend our questions.

Most of the residents interviewed indicated they did not receive social services; however, they also expressed little interest in receiving such services. Residents were generally aware of their income source(s), but over half did not know the amount. About two-thirds of the interviewees stated they endorse their checks over to the boarding home operator; most indicated they receive some spending

This test established that the SDX file contains the information necessary to identify boarding homes housing significant numbers of SSI recipients. By using the data in this file, States will be able to enforce the standards that they were required to establish under section 1616(e). In addition, when boarding homes are identified, States' social services agencies will be able to locate and offer SSI recipients social services available to them under title XX of the Social Security Act.

BOARDING HOME CONDITIONS

The conditions we found in our visits to boarding homes were similar to those disclosed in many studies, investigations, and newspaper articles, which concluded that boarding homes housing SSI recipients were a national problem. These visits also reaffirmed the results of our prior reports regarding the lack of needed social services being provided to the elderly and mentally disabled 1/ and the placement of mentally disabled individuals in overcrowded and sub-standard facilities. 2/

Baltimore, Maryland

We visited 24 boarding homes--13 licensed and 11 unlicensed. Seven of the 11 unlicensed homes were unknown to State or local licensing authorities. As a result of information obtained during our visits, 12 boarding homes were referred to State or local authorities for further investigation.

Following are examples of SSI recipients living in unsafe and unsanitary facilities and in situations indicating a need for protective oversight.

--One dirty and disorganized home housed six SSI recipients. It was January, and the sole source of heat was a gas cooking stove with its burners fully on. Also, the wooden fire escape connecting the second and third floors was completely rotted out.

1/"State Programs for Delivering Title XX Social Services to Supplemental Security Income Beneficiaries Can Be Improved" (HRD-79-59; Apr. 11, 1979).

2/See note, p. 2.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL SECURITY RECORDS CAN HELP STATES

IDENTIFY BOARDING HOMES HOUSING SSI RECIPIENTS

SSA records can be used to help States identify boarding homes housing SSI recipients. Lack of any means to systematically identify and locate boarding homes has been a problem; this problem must be overcome if States are to fully enforce the boarding home standards they have established under section 1616(e) of the Social Security Act.

We developed a computerized information retrieval process using SSA records to identify potential boarding homes. We field tested the results in two metropolitan areas. Our test confirmed that many homes are not licensed by or known to State or local authorities. Also, in visiting the homes, we found many conditions similar to those publicized in numerous studies, investigations, and newspaper articles.

Until recently, HEW has had a legal question concerning what steps needed to be taken before States could use these data. Also, technical barriers may prevent many States from using this process to identify potential boarding homes. SSA has resolved the legal question and has begun action to overcome the technical barriers.

IDENTIFYING BOARDING HOMES

SSA's State Data Exchange (SDX) file contains eligibility and payment information used to administer the SSI program. We extracted select information from this file: name and address, current payment status and amount, and basis for SSI eligibility--age, blindness, or disability. Our data retrieval process, when applied to the SDX file for Baltimore, Maryland, and Camden County, New Jersey, pinpointed addresses to which three or more SSI checks were being sent each month. We then excluded addresses of obvious non-boarding homes, such as institutions, apartment buildings, and hotels, and addresses of groups of persons who appeared to have a family relationship (same surname). We considered the remaining 385 addresses--292 in Baltimore and 93 in Camden County--as potential boarding homes (that is, facilities providing room and board to three or more apparently unrelated SSI recipients not under institutional care).

From these, we randomly selected 74 addresses--49 in Baltimore and 25 in Camden County--for team visits by our staff members accompanied by State or local inspectors. From these visits, we were able to establish that 38 of

in which a significant number of SSI recipients reside or are likely to reside. The standards are published in each State's annual program services plan as required by title XX of the Social Security Act. The standards cover such matters as admission policies, safety, sanitation, and protection of civil rights.

The act does not provide for financial assistance to the States to enforce the standards. The only penalty the act provides for is a reduced SSI payment to a recipient who resides in a facility that does not meet the State standards.

Social services

Individuals eligible to receive SSI payments are also eligible to receive a comprehensive range of social services under title XX of the Social Security Act.

These services, provided under State-administered programs, are directed toward achieving five broad national goals. Two of these goals are particularly applicable to SSI boarding home residents:

- To protect children and adults who cannot protect themselves from abuse, neglect, and exploitation and to help families to stay together.
- To prevent and reduce inappropriate institutional care as much as possible by making home and community services available.

SCOPE OF REVIEW

Although the boarding home issue, with its attendant tragic accounts of abuse and exploitation, has been publicized nationally and studied extensively, a major question remains: How can the location of boarding homes housing significant numbers of SSI recipients be identified?

Our principal objective was to answer this question. Consequently, we focused on developing a computerized data retrieval process which, when applied to SSI payment records, would identify addresses of potential boarding homes where multiple SSI checks were being mailed to unrelated individuals. We field tested the usefulness of this process in two locations--Baltimore, Maryland, and Camden County, New Jersey. We also interviewed residents and operators of randomly selected boarding homes.

following factors contributed to the growth of deinstitutionalization.

- A humanitarian concern over the deplorable conditions in many public institutions.
- New treatment methods and philosophies.
- The advent of psychotropic (tranquilizing) drugs.
- The availability of public funds for providing income support and for expanding community facilities.
- The savings to the States from placing persons in facilities where costs are lower than in mental institutions and where the Federal Government would pay part, most, or all of the costs.
- Court decisions requiring the return of institutionalized persons to the community.

In January 1977, we reported that, although many mentally disabled persons released from institutions had been placed in decent housing in safe neighborhoods, many others had been placed in crowded, substandard facilities in unsafe neighborhoods, in facilities inappropriate to their needs, or in facilities without provision for needed services. 1/

In this report, we characterize as "boarding homes" various community facilities that are known in different locations by different names, such as foster care homes, board and care homes, domiciliary care facilities, congregate care facilities, unlicensed nursing homes, halfway houses, personal care homes, and sheltered care homes.

THE SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME PROGRAM

With the advent of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program on January 1, 1974, needy aged, blind, and disabled people began receiving monthly Federal cash assistance. The assistance they receive (presently \$208.20 for

1/"Returning the Mentally Disabled to the Community: Government Needs To Do More" (HRD-76-152, Jan. 7, 1977).

GAO concluded that information contained in Social Security Administration records, specifically the State Data Exchange file, can be used to assist in identifying boarding homes housing SSI recipients. (See p. 13.)

There was prolonged consideration within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) of the basis upon which the States would be authorized to use the information for the purpose of identifying boarding homes. The attorneys in HEW's Office of General Counsel, in September 1979, advised the Social Security Administration that restrictions upon the States using the information could be lifted by honoring requests from the States under the Freedom of Information Act. The attorneys noted that, for the Secretary to carry out her responsibilities under section 1616(e) of the Social Security Act, States would have to request and be granted permission to use these records. (See p. 12.)

Many States may lack the computer or programming capability to manipulate the data in the State Data Exchange file into a format usable for identifying boarding homes. This would severely limit the State's ability to enforce its boarding home standards. (See p. 12.)

The Secretary of HEW should

- notify each State of the decision that information in the data exchange file may be used to assist in identifying boarding homes,
- provide computer and programming assistance to any State that lacks the capability to manipulate the State Data Exchange file to produce data in a format usable for identifying potential boarding homes, and
- monitor States' efforts to enforce the standards established under section 1616(e) and help resolve problems encountered. (See pp. 13 and 14.)

