Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries
Protection & Advocacy Grantee Report
July through December 2019

The Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act of 2018 was signed into law on April 13, 2018. Disability Rights of Arkansas (DRA) began startup activities the following month. Please see “Attachment A” which lists DRA’s expenses for this grant for the period ending December 31, 2019.

I. Staffing

The primary staffing for the Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries (SPSSB) program remains unchanged from the January through June 2019 report, so no expenses related to hiring have been incurred. DRA continues to employ two full-time reviewers (Jackie Gorton and Rose Lewis) and a supervising attorney (Thomas Nichols) who is also DRA’s Director of Legal and Advocacy Services. The plan to incorporate two additional advocates into the SPSSB program to assist with outreach and education activities, with a planned launch of October 1, 2019, has been delayed due to one staff person’s departure and the subsequent increased responsibilities for the other staff person. This initiative is still expected to commence in 2020 and will utilize approximately 15% of each advocate’s total work hours.

II. Security Clearance

As DRA’s staff has remained unchanged, no expenses have been incurred for activities such as the suitability process, obtaining credentials, or acquiring laptops from Social Security.

III. Training received

DRA’s two SPSSB reviewers did not attend any trainings relative to the SPSSB program. DRA’s Executive Director, Finance Director, and Director of Legal and Advocacy Services devoted a combined 15 hours of time at the NDRN Fiscal Managers conference specific to the SPSSB program.

IV. Participation at conferences and on calls

An analysis of staff time recorded to the SPSSB program from July through December 2019 reflects a total of 61 staff hours involving NDRN committees, calls, and meetings, as well as training and education activities. Program staff participated in advisory workgroup calls and project manager calls. Staff also participated in SSA and NDRN trainings for the SPSSB program on contractor awareness, the Justice in Aging in the Representative Payee program for Older Adults, a RPMT User workshop, a RPMT training, and an
SSA Questions and Answers conference call. Program staff also continued to review transcripts and materials sent by NDRN.

V. Outreach to community partners

DRA staff completed a program brochure during the previous reporting period; no new brochures were developed during this reporting period. DRA program staff continue to maintain a supply of several SSA publications to distribute during reviews. As noted in Section I of this report (staffing), DRA’s outreach plan has been slightly delayed due to (non-SPSSB) staff turnover; DRA is currently hiring an additional advocate and will commence with the outreach program once new staff are hired and trained for this initiative.

VI. Orientation for P & A staff

Because principal program staff are unchanged since the inception of the program, orientation activities occurred during the initial six-month time period and were reported in the May through December 2018 semi-annual progress report. It is anticipated there will be orientation activities once other DRA advocates are ready to begin conducting outreach for the SPSSB program during monitoring visits to congregate facilities.

VII. Representative Payee Reviews

DRA program staff continue to follow a prescribed set of pre-review activities; the following is a description of those activities:

- Review all information provided in the Representative Payee Monitoring Tool (RPMT) system
- Check the Disability Advocacy Database (DAD) for prior contacts with both representative payees and beneficiaries selected for review
- Check Court Connect for any relevant information involving the representative payees (RP) and selected beneficiaries
- Create a hard file of all documents needed for review
- Check available Department of Human Services (DHS), Secretary of State, etc. databases and websites for relevant information
- Initiate contact with representative payees to schedule the review
- Gather pre-interview information from representative payees as directed by SSA
- Initiate contact with beneficiaries, third parties, legal guardians, Adult Protective Services (APS), etc. to schedule reviews
- Send appointment letters to all parties
- Send call-in letters, if needed
- Document all contacts in RPMT
- Complete/submit travel authorization requests for rental cars/hotel
- Initiate any notifications/issues in RPMT
- Gather any additional information such as DRA rights posters, DRA information packets, SSA publications, and other resource materials
Similarly, DRA program staff follow a prescribed review process, which consists of:

- Allowing adequate travel time to pick up/return rental car and drive to/from review site
- Conducting onsite interviews with representative payees and additional appropriate staff
- Reviewing all financial records provided
- Documenting information from the review
- Interviewing beneficiaries capable of participating in an interview at their individual residences
- Meeting any other beneficiaries who are not capable of participating in a review
- Conducting interviews of any staff identified as appropriate 3rd party individuals
- Touring the facility
- Conducting an exit interview to discuss findings
- Traveling as needed to visit the homes of beneficiaries who reside in the community

Finally, DRA’s reporting process is as follows:

- Complete all required forms – SSA 637, SSA 639s, worksheets, etc.
- Review information for accuracy and consistency
- Scan all relevant documents received
- Upload all relevant documents to RPMT
- Initiate any required notifications or issues
- Follow up with representative payees, beneficiaries, or 3rd parties/legal guardians to clear up any identified discrepancies
- Identify any relevant deficiencies
- Develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) and submit for approval
- Complete review dashboard
- Submit report to NAG for review
- Issue CAP and request evidence of correction

Other review activities
- Completion/submission of travel reimbursement forms

**Status of DRA’s FY2019 Case Reviews: 58 total reviews assigned**

Assigned: 1*
Scheduling: 5 (one of which is a QRC)**
Interview: 10***
CAP NAG Review: 1
CAP Regional Office Review: 3
CAP Evidence Collection: 7
National Association Grantee (NAG) Final Review: 3
Regional Office Final Review: 11
Completed: 12
Closeout: 1
Canceled: 4

* This case transferred to Arkansas from Mississippi in November 2019. It remained a FY2019 case at transfer.

**These cases are still listed in the scheduling stage due to the NAG or RO needing to update this information. The beneficiaries were not located and/or did not respond.

***Representative payee interviews are complete, beneficiary interviews are complete (excepting those with unknown whereabouts), final reports have been prepared, and DRA is awaiting permission to submit the reports.

****One of these cases resulted from a P&A nomination submitted on 9/26/19. SSA assigned it as a FY2019 review at that time.

Status of DRA’s FY2020 Case Reviews: 70 total reviews assigned

Assigned: 66
Interview: 3
CAP NAG Review: 1

September 2019: 10 cases released to Arkansas by SSA
November 2019: 60 remaining cases released to Arkansas by SSA

Time spent on travel: approximately 425 hours
Time spent on reviews: approximately 1,400 hours

P&A Nominations

DRA has submitted 22 nominations; five were rejected by SSA, and 17 were ultimately assigned as reviews.

VIII. Other

Fewer than ten hours were spent on travel to Social Security offices for equipment (laptops); however, 52 hours were spent dealing with information technology (IT) issues; approximately 27 hours were spent on grants management activities, primarily producing the semi-annual report for January through June 2019, reading grant requirements and guidance materials, and preparing a carryover request.