

UNITED STATES SENATOR • IOWA
CHUCK GRASSLEY
RANKING MEMBER • SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

<http://grassley.senate.gov>
press_office@grassley.senate.gov

Contact: Jill Kozeny, 202/224-1308
Jill Gerber, 202/224-6522

MEMORANDUM

To: Reporters and Editors
Fr: Jill Gerber, 202/224-6522
Re: Fugitive Felon Report
Da: Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2002

Sen. Chuck Grassley, ranking member of the Committee on Finance, last year asked the General Accounting Office (GAO) to review a program to prevent fugitive felons from improperly receiving federal dollars. The program is administered by the Social Security Administration. As Finance Committee chairman in April 2001, Grassley held a hearing to expose improper Medicare and Social Security payments to fugitives, prisoners, the deceased, and other ineligible people. Grassley made the following comment in response to the GAO report released today.

“I agree with GAO’s conclusion that ‘the fugitive felon program has provided a valuable service by helping the Social Security Administration to identify and prevent payments to ineligible SSI recipients and helping law enforcement agencies to locate and apprehend fugitive felons.’

“Since the program’s enactment, SSA has worked with federal, state, and local authorities to develop systems and procedures to implement this program. The latest statistics indicate the program has made substantial progress in recent years. Since the program began in August 1996 through September 2001, this program has helped to identify 45,071 felons who were paid \$81.6 million in SSI benefits. Of these fugitives, 5,019 were subsequently apprehended. The projected savings to the government is \$132.9 million. Soon after I chaired the Finance hearing on this issue in April 2001, the program had an uptick in the number of felons identified and arrested and the projected savings achieved. From April 1, 2001, through Sept. 30, 2001, 15,306 felons were identified and 1,479 fugitives were arrested, for a projected savings to the government of \$41.5 million.

“Unfortunately, the GAO also found that SSA has experienced significant technological and other barriers to achieving and sustaining efficient and effective program operations, and ultimately, helping SSA overcome GAO’s designation of SSI as a high-risk program. The GAO made this designation because of SSA’s insufficient oversight that makes the program susceptible to waste, fraud and abuse.

“On the technical side, SSA has had considerable difficulty obtaining comprehensive felony warrant information from all 50 states. Without complete access to this vital information, the program can never be fully successful.

“On the oversight side, SSA lacks clear and unified management accountability to direct the fugitive felon program. GAO noted the program would benefit from the appointment of an agency-

wide program administrator, and that additional steps could be taken to automate the program. I'm hopeful SSA will give these recommendations every consideration.

“Finally, I believe SSA should conduct a complete and thorough cost-benefit analysis of this program. Such information would be invaluable as Congress continues to consider legislation to expand the program to include OASDI beneficiaries. The bottom line is, this program has to work to protect taxpayers. The taxpayers are ripped off when fugitives collect payments they don't deserve. Fugitives from justice don't need a government subsidy to enjoy life on the lam.”