EM - Emergency Message  Effective Date: 04/14/2021

Identification Number: EM-21030 SEN
Intended Audience: All RCs/ARC/ADs/FOs/TSCs/WSUs/PSCs/OCO/OARO/CSTs/OHO/OARO
Originating Office: ORDP OISP
Title: Accepting Faxed Applications During the COVID-19 Pandemic – One Time Instruction
Type: EM - Emergency Messages
Program: All Programs
Link To Reference: See References at the end of this EM.

SENSITIVE - NOT TO BE SHARED WITH THE PUBLIC

Retention Date: 10/14/2021

A. Purpose
This emergency message (EM) establishes a temporary procedure that allows individuals to submit faxed applications to SSA during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. For purposes of this EM, the term “fax” refers to both analog fax and eFax. This EM pertains to faxed benefit applications for Title II (Social Security Benefits), Title VIII (Special Veterans Benefits), Title XVI (Supplemental Security Income), and Title XVIII (Medicare) only. Please refer to existing instructions for other forms and documents received via fax, for example, see EM-20022 REV 2 for receipt of form SSA-1696.

B. Background
Under the current valid application policy in GN 00204.001, a faxed application does not meet the signature requirement to qualify as a valid application; we consider a faxed application to be the same as a photocopy.

We established the flexibility described in section A above as a measure to improve the application submission process during the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective April 14, 2021, faxes of applications will be temporarily acceptable. The fax must appear to be of an original document containing a legible, handwritten signature.

C. Procedure for handling faxed applications
Technicians must review the faxed application to determine whether it meets the criteria above to accept and process as an application. Process acceptable faxed applications in the same manner as paper applications with a pen-and-ink signature by following the process set forth in GN 00201.015H.

Do not accept a faxed application in the following situations:

- The application or signature is illegible or distorted; or
- The signature appears to be an electronic or a digitized image of a handwritten signature.

If the faxed application is not acceptable based on one of the situations described above, take the following actions:

- Attempt phone contact with the claimant or proper applicant using the phone number displayed on the application;
- Document the facts surrounding the unprocessed application and document your call attempt, whether successful or unsuccessful, on the RPOC and DROC screens or the Enhanced Leads and Appointment System (eLAS), as appropriate;
- If phone contact is successful:
  - Verify the claimant’s or proper applicant’s identity, per GN 00203.020.
  - Follow the attestation procedure in GN 00201.015.
  - If phone contact is successful, but the claimant or proper applicant denies signing the application or fails to establish his or her identity, follow instructions in EM-20038 SEN.
  - If the claimant or proper applicant properly identifies himself or herself and denies filing the application, but wishes to file for benefits, schedule an initial claim appointment in eLAS.
- If phone contact is unsuccessful:
  - Send a protective filing closeout notice to the address on the application, per GN 00204.012, unless we have already appropriately closed out the protective filing.

   **NOTE:** Third party-initiated iClaim filers automatically receive a protective filing
closeout online or via the SSA-L2, per GN 00204.055D 4.b.

Direct all program-related and technical questions to your Regional Office (RO) support staff or Program Service Center (PSC) Operations Analysis (OA) staff. RO support staff or PSC OA staff may refer questions, concerns, or problems to their Central Office contacts.

References
GN 00201.010 Signature Requirements
GN 00201.015 Alternative Signature Methods
GN 00203.020 Identity of Claimants
GN 00204.001 Valid Application
GN 00204.012 How to Close a Protective Filing
GN 00204.055 Internet Claim (iClaim) Application
GN 01010.475 Abatements
EM-18043 SEN REV 3 Authenticated and Unauthenticated iClaim Business Process
EM-20010 SEN REV 6 Disaster Procedures – COVID-19 Pandemic – One-Time Instruction
EM-20022 REV 2 Temporary Instructions for the Bundled Receipt and Processing of an Electronically Signed SSA-1696 and Certain Other Forms
EM-20038 SEN Disaster Procedures – Handling Anomalous Claims during COVID-19 – One-Time Instruction

EM-21030 SEN - Accepting Faxed Applications During the COVID-19 Pandemic – One Time Instruction - 04/14/2021

Link to this document: