

[Nominations are open for the 2026 Fed100 awards](#)

[From data to patient-centered care: AI-driven digital modernization improves health outcomes](#)

SSA abandons planned disability program overhaul expected to cut benefits for thousands



KAYLA BARTKOWSKI/GETTY IMAGES

By [NATALIE ALMS](#) // NOVEMBER 19, 2025 05:12 PM ET

Trump administration officials informed the co-founder of a nonprofit disability advocacy group that a proposed rule — which would have updated decades-old occupational data, in addition to changing eligibility considerations — will no longer be moving forward.

SSA WHITE HOUSE



The Social Security Administration is abandoning plans to [promulgate](#) rules that experts say would have resulted in thousands of people losing their disability benefits.

White House deputy chief of staff James Blair and SSA Commissioner Frank Bisignano both told Jason Turkish, co-founder of the nonprofit disability advocacy group Alliance for America’s Promise, that the forthcoming regulations are not moving forward, Turkish wrote in an email update Wednesday.

The White House itself, however, said it had not seen such a proposed regulation, despite multiple reports that the administration is abandoning the overhaul.

"Despite media speculation about a potential rule change, the White House has not seen any such proposal," a White House official told Nextgov/FCW. "The only policy change to Social Security is President Trump’s working families tax cuts legislation, which eliminated taxation of Social Security for almost all beneficiaries — something that every single Democrat voted against."

SSA didn’t respond to a request for comment.

When the Social Security Administration decides to issue someone a disability benefit, they have to consider whether an applicant can do substantial work by comparing their claim against a list of jobs.

The agency still uses occupational data developed by the Labor Department in 1938 and last updated in 1991. Since 2012, SSA has been working on updating that data into a list of modern jobs with the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The forthcoming proposed rule was expected not only to replace that outdated data, but also to change how other factors like age and education weigh into the process — changes that could affect eligibility and who gets benefits.

[Experts](#), advocates and [Democrats](#) in Congress had warned that changes in the proposed rule could drastically cut eligibility for the Social Security Disability Insurance program.

These restrictions were expected to be especially acute among older people due to changes in how age is accounted for in the process.

Jack Smalligan, senior fellow at the Urban Institute, [estimated](#) in a September paper that if the proposed regulation reduced eligibility by 10%, 500,000 people could lose access to Social Security disability insurance benefits over 10 years.

Supplemental security income benefits would also be affected by the regulatory changes, although the exact impacts weren’t yet clear, said Smalligan. Overall, the overhaul was expected to be the most significant change to the two disability programs to date.

The abandonment of the planned regulatory overhaul comes as Democrats have hammered the Trump administration on Social Security for months, criticizing the work of the Department of Government Efficiency at the agency in cutting employees and sharing sensitive data across government agencies.

“This proposal comes as the Trump Administration is making extreme changes at SSA that threaten the integrity of Social Security and access to earned benefits for seniors, people with disabilities, and survivors,” over 160 House Democrats wrote to Bisignano in a [letter](#) opposing the rule late last month.

A former Trump official at SSA, Mark Warshawsky, who worked on [similar](#) rulemaking in the first Trump administration that wasn’t finalized, has [argued](#) that the current rules “embody the view that middle-age workers ... cannot adjust to new types of jobs, especially if they have modest educations, performed only physical labor, and are unskilled — even when new work is available that is sedentary and requires little training.”

Lifespans are increasing and people are working further into old age, Warshawsky said.

It’s unclear at this point exactly how the abandonment of the forthcoming proposed rule will affect SSA’s plan to move to the newer occupational data it’s been developing with BLS for years, although in the short term it almost certainly delays it.

It’s a “lost opportunity,” said Smalligan, “to use far more current data about both jobs in the economy and about the requirements of those jobs.”

Using such outdated data can block claimants from benefits if the government finds that they could be doing work that may have existed decades ago, when the data was developed, but no longer does, as the Washington Post has [detailed](#).

“There is an ability in a less rigorous way, to use the [newer] data to some extent, but without the regulatory restructuring that was being contemplated, that would be a much more limited application,” he continued.

“It is already very challenging for Americans with disabilities to meet the exacting standards for being approved for disability benefits, and the proposed changes would have made the system much worse,” Jennifer Burdick, an attorney who represents clients seeking disability benefits at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia, told *Nextgov/FCW* in a statement, saying that Bisignano made “the right choice.”

Editor's note: This article has been updated to include comment from the White House. **N**

If you have a tip you'd like to share, Natalie Alms can be securely contacted at nalms.41 on Signal.

Share This:



NEXT STORY: [Trump administration resumes funding for inspectors general hub after previously blocking it](#)



Trump administration resumes funding for inspectors general hub after previously blocking it

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, at the Capitol on Oct. 6, 2025. Grassley, a longtime supporter of inspectors general, applauded the Trump administration's Tuesday reversal to fund CIGIE through Jan. 30. CHIP SOMODEVILLA / GETTY IMAGES

By **NATALIE ALMS AND SEAN MICHAEL NEWHOUSE** // **NOVEMBER 18, 2025 07:00 PM ET**

OMB’s move to restore CIGIE funding until Jan. 30 comes as the president has already fired or replaced more than 20 agency inspectors general.

OMB OVERSIGHT



The Office of Management and Budget has restored funding to a central inspector general group, [Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, said](#) on Tuesday.

The Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency will receive nearly \$4.3 million to operate through Jan. 30, which is when the [funding agreement that ended the 43-day government shutdown](#) expires.

The Trump administration on Sept. 26 informed CIGIE — an independent entity tasked with assisting IG offices across agencies — that it would [not be apportioned congressionally approved funding to it for fiscal 2026](#), which began in October. While that coincides with the start of the shutdown, the entity is supported by a [no-year revolving account](#), so its operations would not have been affected by a lapse in appropriations.

Grassley, a longtime IG defender, and Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, pushed back on the administration’s decision in [a Sept. 29 letter](#) to OMB Director Russ Vought.

OMB shortly thereafter [apportioned \\$5 million to the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee](#), a part of CIGIE that investigates fraud in COVID-19 pandemic spending and was [extended until 2034](#) in the [One Big Beautiful Bill Act](#). The White House, however, in an October statement said that IGs “have become corrupt, partisan and in some cases, have lied to the public” and that “the American people will no longer be funding this corruption.”

Grassley and Collins welcomed the Trump administration’s reversal Tuesday to resume funding for CIGIE.

“This action, building on OMB’s earlier decision to release funding for PRAC, ensures that these important oversight entities can remain focused on delivering the accountability American taxpayers deserve,” they said in a statement. “Our oversight of the administration’s actions, and CIGIE’s work, will continue.”

Grassley also said that OMB will conduct a “programmatic review” of CIGIE.

The funding interruption impacted CIGIE’s congressionally authorized activities, which include providing training to IG employees and operating an oversight body that reviews allegations of wrongdoing against the watchdogs. [At least 15 IG websites with whistleblower hotlines also went dark](#) as a result of the funding disruption, because CIGIE runs a central [Oversight.gov](#) website that hosts the websites for 28 IG offices.

In response, many watchdog offices set up new, temporary websites, and [Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee stood up their own online presence](#) to house hotlines.

As of Tuesday afternoon, both the [CIGIE website](#) and [Oversight.gov](#) — which hosts more than 34,000 IG reports — were back up. The websites of several of the affected watchdog offices are still temporary sites set up to house complaint portals, while a few appear to be fully functioning again.

OMB did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

Trump has, so far, fired 19 IGs and [replaced acting IGs at five agencies](#). Good government groups have warned that these removals are [weakening independent government oversight](#). [N](#)

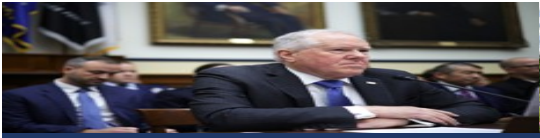
Share your news tips with us:
Sean Michael Newhouse: snewhouse@govexec.com, Signal: seanthenewsboy.45
Natalie Alms: nalms@govexec.com, Signal: nalms.41

Share This:



NEXT STORY: [‘We’re closer to the end’: Lawmakers signal some progress in bipartisan talks to end shutdown](#)





[erators must be held accountable for AI’s use in conflicts, Air Force secretary says](#)[Why NIST is prioritizing creating a dictionary of AI development](#)



[ictures tech shop to center on the CIO](#)[How a push to the cloud helped a Ukrainian bank keep faith with customers amid war](#)[The people problem behind the government’s AI ambitio](#)



[Modernization: Federal IT Between Now and Next](#)