April 18, 2012

Jasmeet K. Seehra

Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, OMB

Room 10235, New Executive Office Bldg.

725 17th St. NW

Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Ms. Seehra:

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is requesting emergency clearance for the Secure Provider Portal (Portal), a new information collection instrument related to OMB Control No. 0960-0644. The background, business process description, and justification for requesting emergency clearance follow.

**Background**

In keeping with section *1148* of the *Social Security Act*, the agency has two program managers to assist in administering the Ticket to Work (Ticket) program. Based on guidance issued at the beginning of FY 2012, we are preparing to reduce the contract spending for the program manager contract that handles daily operations related to employment service providers participating in the Ticket program. These service providers are State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies and private and public employment service providers referred to as employment networks (ENs). Part of the program manager’s role in helping SSA administer the program is to serve as a clearinghouse for information flowing between these entities and the agency. The agency’s plan to achieve a contract reduction of 15 percent by the end of FY 2012 includes automating the document support services under the contract and reducing staff. To ensure that the Portal is piloted and implemented fully before the staffing reductions occur later this fiscal year, we are requesting emergency clearance of this new collection instrument.

**Description of Collection**

This collection, associated with *20 CFR, Part 411* (The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program), establishes an efficient and effective way for employment service providers to continue doing business with SSA through the Ticket program manager despite reduced contract spending*.*  The Portal is an online tool that will allow ENs and State VR agencies to retrieve or submit information electronically via a secured area of the website. The Portal will be accessible to ENs and State VR agencies to use instead of completing paper forms and faxing or mailing them. ENs will be able to check beneficiaries’ eligibility to participate in the program, submit work plans for beneficiaries or addendums to them, report services provided, request payments, and respond to requests related to reporting beneficiaries’ progress toward work goals, and more. We estimate use of the Portal will represent a burden reduction of approximately 25 percent for ENs and State VR agencies using it instead of Forms SSA-1365, SSA-1370, SSA-L1377, SSA‑1389, SSA-1391, SSA-1392, SSA-1396, and SSA-1401 under OMB No. 0960-0644.

The Portal reduces the time and cost of transactions and processing requests for all involved, ENs, State VR agencies, and the Ticket program manager. It also reduces the time and cost to the program manager of handling phone inquiries for status information since the Portal provides electronic tracking of all requests and submissions instead of manual tracking.

The Portal does not display personal information that would allow someone outside of the authorized ENs to determine the identity of an individual. Social Security’s Office of Information Systems (OIS) cleared the Portal for use in a pilot with a select group of ENs. OIS anticipates full security clearance for the Portal in May 2012.

We expect to use the Portal immediately upon approval and continue to use this ongoing information collection while seeking full clearance of it along with the current information collections under OMB Control No. 0960-0644.

**Business Process**

Service providers (ENs and State VR agencies) will access the Portal by going to the URL SSA will provide to them for the “Sign In” link where they may enter a unique login credential SSA will provide. The EN or State VR agency will then click on “Go to” in the toolbar and select “EN Portal” from the menu. They may then choose the type of transaction they wish to perform using the navigation area on the left of the screen to select a particular form, report, or query. When accessing a form, they will click on the subject of the form. The EN or State VR agency will be identifiable in the database by the Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) because we will tie this information to the login ID. Next, the EN or State VR agency will enter the beneficiary’s SSN. If the transaction can be performed, the EN or State VR agency will be guided through the process. After reviewing the form, the EN or State VR agency can click the “Submit” button to send the information to MAXIMUS. Clicking the “Submit” button will also bring up a confirmation page, identifying the EN or State VR agency that made the submission, the date of the submission, and the form they submitted. The EN or State VR agency will also receive this confirmation by email.

In addition to accessing reports and checking the availability of a Ticket for assignment, the State VR agency or EN may use the Portal for the following tasks:

* To send the program manager information signifying the relationship that has been established between the agency and the ticket holder;
* To notify the program manager to take a ticket out of assignment or close the case of a Ticket holder that the State VR agency was serving under the cost reimbursement option;
* To certify whether the ticket holder is making the expected progress towards financial self-sufficiency;
* To send a request for payment to the program manager for each milestone or outcome payment attained; and
* To request the program manager to check its records for an indication of beneficiary’s earnings.

**Need for Emergency Clearance**

ENs are anticipating the administrative efficiencies this Portal represents and may have adjusted their own resources expecting it to be available by May 1, 2012. In addition, to implement the contract reduction, we have already let some contracting staff go with the expectation that we will pilot and fully implement before we make the final contract reductions. We are requesting emergency OMB approval of the Portal to meet EN expectations and to allow sufficient time to use and ensure that the new processes work as expected before making final 2012 contract reductions.

If the Portal is not available for use until late summer, it will result in reduced FY 2012 productively since it will continue to take ENs longer to submit requests and it will take us longer to process them. The inability to process ticket assignments timely would delay services to the beneficiaries. The inability to process payment requests would delay payments to EN’s and State VR’s for the services they provided beneficiaries. In addition, if the Portal is not available for use until shortly before the remaining contract reductions are made, and there are problems with transitioning to it, there will not be manpower to process ticket assignments, payment requests, and other incoming documents, or to fulfill the requests for reports. This would bottleneck or possibly suspend some daily operations.

To ensure the Portal is available for EN use by May 2012, we are asking for OMB approval of this Emergency Clearance by **May 17, 2012**.

Please contact me with questions at 410-965-8783 or faye.lipsky@ssa.gov.

 Sincerely,

 Faye I. Lipsky

 Reports Clearance Director

 Social Security Administration