

May 23, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education
and Related Activities
Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education
and Related Activities
Committee on Appropriations
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter,

The undersigned organizations represent many of the stakeholders of the Social Security Administration (SSA). We respectfully request that your Subcommittee provide no less than \$240 million above the President's Budget Request for SSA's administrative expenses in the Fiscal Year 2009 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

This additional funding is critical for SSA to address an ever increasing number of service delivery issues. The most critical issue is the massive backlog in disability hearings. Currently, over 750,000 hearings are pending, and the average wait for a decision is over 500 days. This is after the fact that most disability applicants wait an average of 240 days before filing for a hearing. As a result thousands of people are dying before they receive a decision on their disability claim. And an untold number are suffering severe financial hardships, including a rising number of home foreclosures. Many do not have health care, resulting in further deterioration of their conditions. Although SSA is beginning to make progress on the hearings backlog, the agency does not expect the backlog to be eliminated until 2013 unless additional resources are provided.

Not only has there been a marked degradation in the level of service that SSA provides related to the disability process, visitors to local SSA Field Offices are also being negatively impacted. Field Offices are seeing record numbers of visitors with the baby boom population now filing for benefits. Baby boomers are retiring at a rate of 10,000 per day. In many Field Offices these visitors are experiencing waiting times that are in excess of 2 hours. For those who try to reach their local SSA Field Office by telephone, busy rates are running at an unacceptable rate of well over 50% in many locations. This is due in large part to the fact that Field Offices are receiving over 60 million business-related phone calls each year. Staffing cuts have often left no one to answer the phone as most of the employees in the field are interviewing claimants all day.

In addition, SSA continues to be given responsibility for new workloads such as providing assistance with Medicare Part D cases and increasingly complex security

checks. At the same time SSA will need to reduce the number of SSI redeterminations and medical Continuing Disability Reviews scheduled for FY 2009 by 40% and over 50% respectively from levels earlier in the decade. With the level of funding proposed by the President for FY 2009, over four billion dollars will be lost due to reducing these program integrity workloads.

Adding to the challenges facing the agency, SSA's information technology systems are in severe need of additional investment. Most of SSA's systems components are over 30 years old. The agency has over 36 million lines of older computing language known as COBOL which will need to be rewritten. This task will be made more complex because SSA utilizes over 100 separate programs to accomplish its work.

SSA is facing these many workload challenges while at its lowest staffing levels since 1972, prior to the implementation of the SSI program. About 25% of the agency's core staff, the Claims Representatives in the Field Offices and Teleservice Centers, are expected to retire in three years. In addition, over 30% of SSA's management is expected to retire during that same period. The state Disability Determination Services have lost over 1,300 employees since the beginning of FY 2006. SSA must find a way to begin to hire and train new employees now to address the loss of so much of its trained staff and to handle the increased baby boomer workloads.

For all of these reasons, we respectfully request that you provide no less than \$240 million above the President's Budget Request for SSA's administrative expenses in the Fiscal Year 2009 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. We are confident that this increased investment in SSA will benefit our entire nation. On behalf of our members throughout the country, we appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

AARP

American Association of Homes and
Services for the Aging

AFL-CIO

American Association on Intellectual
and Developmental Disabilities

Alliance for Retired Americans

American Association of People with
Disabilities

American Association of Social Security
Disability Consultants

American Foundation for the Blind

American Federation of Government
Employees

National Adult Day Services Association

American Federation of Teachers
Program on Retirement and Retirees

National Alliance on Mental Illness

American Postal Workers Union
Retirees

National Association of Area Agencies
on Aging

Association of Assistive Technology Act
Programs

National Association of Social Workers

Association for Gerontology and Human
Development in Historically Black
Colleges and Universities

National Association of Disability
Examiners

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

National Association of Disability
Representatives

B'nai B'rith International

National Association of Professional
Geriatric Care Managers

Council of State Administrators of
Vocational Rehabilitation

National Association of State Long-
Term Care Ombudsman Programs

Federal Managers Association

National Committee to Preserve Social
Security and Medicare

Gray Panthers

National Council of Disability
Determination Directors

National Council of Social Security
Management Associations

Social Security Disability Coalition

National Disability Rights Network

The Arc of the United States

National Multiple Sclerosis Society

United Cerebral Palsy

National Organization of Social Security
Claimants' Representatives

United Spinal Association

National Respite Coalition

Voice of the Retarded

National Senior Citizens Law Center

National Treasury Employees Union

OWL, The Voice of Midlife and Older
Women

Paralyzed Veterans of America

Social Security Section of the Federal
Bar Association