

# Staffing Cuts Devastate Public Service at SSA!

February 2019

	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	Fy 2020
Budget Proposed*	11,603	12,528	12,673	11,897	12,457	12,182	12,724	13,237	12,664	12,393	n/a
Budget Enacted*	11,449	11,563	11,556	11,046	11,846	11,992	12,368	12,500	12,873	12,908	
SSA Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs)	65,114	67,303	64,545	61,861	61,767	63,698	63,159	61,104	61,014	60,036	
Overtime/Lump Sum Leave	3,731	2,328	2,418	2,181	3,148	2,347	2,113	1,851	1,648	998	
<b>Total SSA Work Years</b>	70,758	69,936	67,208	64,601	64,006	67,004	65,798	62,955	62,662	61,024	
		<b>-822</b>	<b>-2,728</b>	<b>-2,607</b>	<b>-595</b>	<b>2,998</b>	<b>-1,206</b>	<b>-2843</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>-1,638</b>	

## Full funding of SSA Field Offices in FY 20 Labor-HHS Appropriations Bill

Years of inadequate budgets for SSA have taken their toll, causing the agency to lose 12 percent of its staff since 2010, close field offices and shorten office hours, even as it faces record-high workloads.

While implementing spending reductions SSA has also saved money by making cuts in customer service, increasing automation and reducing the number of Social Security statements that it sends to the public. But these efficiencies can't make up for the fact that SSA serves an additional 1 million beneficiaries each year. As workloads and costs grow and budgets shrink, SSA's service has worsened by nearly every metric. Further cuts would force the agency to freeze hiring, furlough employees, shutter more field offices, and/or further restrict field office hours, leading to yet longer wait times for taxpayers and beneficiaries who need help.

SSA's operating budget shrank 11 percent from 2010 to 2017 in inflation-adjusted terms, just as the demands on SSA reached all-time highs as baby boomers reached their peak years for retirement and disability. Budget cutting has squeezed SSA's operating budget from an already low 0.9 percent of overall Social Security spending in 2010 to just 0.7 percent in 2016. The cuts have hampered SSA's ability to perform its essential services, such as determining eligibility in a timely manner for retirement, survivor, and disability benefits; paying benefits accurately and on time; responding to questions from the public; and updating benefits promptly when circumstances change.

SSA's 2017 appropriation provided the same funding for operating expenses as in 2016, plus \$90 million in dedicated additional funding to hire the staff and make technological improvements needed to reduce the backlog in hearings for disability benefits. This extra money helped but the Agency actually needed over \$150 million of additional appropriations to fully implement the backlog reduction plan.

**For these reasons it is essential that SSA field offices receive a large increase in funds to repair the damage that has been done over the past several years due to short sighted budget cuts.**

### **Establish a Separate Line Item for Field Offices**

In order to be certain that SSA field offices receive the funds necessary to maintain all existing offices, replace closed offices, hire staff lost over the past decade and reassure the public that critical services to beneficiaries will remain available, it is essential that the Appropriations Committees provide funding not only for SSA's Limitation on Administrative Expenses, but also for the full cost of field office and Teleservice Center operations. Last year, the House Appropriations Committee included language in its Committee Report that moved in this direction. ***It said: "Within the total for LAE, the Committee provides not less than \$3,475,000,000 for Field Offices and not more than \$1,750,000,000 for Information Technology".***

Unfortunately, this language was not included in the final conference report and is therefore not binding on SSA. For FY 2020, our goal is to include this language in the Labor-HHS Appropriations Conference Report thereby making clear to the agency that it must fund the field offices at the level established in the bill. Needless to say, the final number must be high enough to support all field office activities as well as provide an inflationary increase of at least \$400 million.