
Some background: President Trump mandated the OMB plan in an Executive Order (EO), signed March 13, 2017, titled Presidential Executive Order on a Comprehensive Plan for Reorganizing the Executive Branch (Reorganization EO). This EO also states that the purpose of federal workforce reorganization is, “to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of the executive branch by drafting a plan to reorganize governmental functions and eliminate unnecessary agencies, components of agencies, and agency programs.” The President specifically mandated the Director to evaluate:

- Whether an agency, or any of its functions, is appropriate for the Federal Government, or would better be done by state or local government or by the private sector;
- Whether the costs of an agency or any of its parts are justified by the public benefits it provides; and
- The costs of shutting down or merging agencies, components or programs.

OMB Director Mulvaney, in his Comprehensive Plan in April, detailed requirements that all agencies start immediately to reduce their workforce and costs in anticipation for funding levels for the President’s FY 2018 Budget, and also by submitting plans for reducing staff over a 4-year period (FYs 2018-2022).

He stated that OPM would provide streamlined templates to agencies for requesting approval to offer Voluntary Early Retirement Authority and Voluntary Separation Incentive Payments with 30 day expedited reviews. He asked Agencies to immediately dispose of unnecessary vacant positions, review all employees on administrative leave for poor performance or alleged misconduct, return them to work, reassign them, take corrective action, or remove them from service.

Mulvaney specified that, by June 30, 2017, each Federal Government component would create an Agency Reform Plan that aims to:

- Create a lean, accountable, more efficient government that works for the American people.
- Focus the Federal Government on effectively and efficiently delivering those programs that are the highest needs to citizens and where there is a unique Federal role.
- Align the Federal workforce to meet the needs of today and the future rather than the requirements of the past; and
- Strengthen agencies by removing barriers that hinder front-line employees from delivering results.

When developing their Agency Reform Plan, in coordination with OMB, agencies should consult with key stakeholders including their workforce.

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More specifically, each Agency Reform Plan should:

- Provide managers greater freedom to manage.
- Improve organizational decision-making.
- Reduce duplicative activities.
- Eliminate unnecessary levels of management and administrative support - including deputy positions, lower level chiefs of staff, special projects, and management analysts.
- Reassign duties to a lower grade.
- Eliminate positions if technology has replaced its need, offer separation incentives to create openings for technological advances, use new technology to automate processes that will result in efficiency and cost savings, and provide online service where possible.
- Examine if they can delegate responsibilities to the State.
- Co-locate offices to save on facility costs.

Simply put, he asked each Federal agency to “use limited resources as smartly as possible by asking: what works, for whom, and under what conditions.”

From there, the OMB will deliver a plan to the President that gathers information in a three-pronged approach: Agency Reform Plans, crosscutting reform proposals, and the public. The OMB defines crosscutting as, “Areas where market or technology changes allow a service to be delivered more efficiently…where multiple Federal agencies interact in fragmented or duplicative ways with State… governments or other stakeholders.”

Public input on reforming and reducing the size of the Federal Civilian workforce ended June 12, 2017.

OMB structures this further timeline:

- By June 30, 2017 – Agencies will submit a progress update on near-term workforce reduction steps and a draft of their Agency Reform Plan that details long-term staff reductions.
- July 2017 – Agencies will participate in discussions with OMB to receive feedback on draft Agency Reform Plans; OMB will offer public input and assignment of immediate actions that, “will include near-term actions to reduce the cost and size of the Federal Civilian workforce.”
- By September 2017 – Agencies will submit their final Agency Reform Plan as part of the FY2019 Budget request and must show evidence of their findings for suggestions.
- Early 2018 - The President will submit to Congress his FY 2019 Budget request that includes OMB’s Government-wide Reform Plan.
- February 2018 - OMB will begin to publicly report workforce reduction levels and closely monitor its Government-wide Reform Plan progress.
Witold Skwierczynski, Council 220 President

On August 1, 2017 AFGE Council 220, with the assistance of the AFGE National union, will launch a yearlong 700 office issue organizing campaign. The reason for this initiative is to encourage SSA bargaining unit employees to get active in saving their jobs, pay, benefits, civil service rights and their union. All are currently in danger due to the political situation in this country.

The current administration has introduced a budget that was passed by Congress that cut staffing in the FY 17 SSA budget by 1932 full time staff from average staffing levels in FY 16 despite the fact that workloads have increased and many workloads are severely backlogged. This will lead to more efforts to shift work to the internet and office closings. (After a 3 year moratorium, SSA has recently announced an office closing in Chicago.) Both the President’s budget and the Republican House budget propose significant cuts in federal employee retirement benefits, SSA disability benefits and SSI benefits. This budget also proposes severe cuts in Medicaid, housing, EPA, education, medical research, etc. while substantially cutting taxes for the wealthy.

Congress has passed legislation that would severely limit appeal rights for those who work in the VA and negate protective language in VA-AFGE contracts. Congress has proposed severe restrictions in the union’s ability to represent employees both in the VA and throughout government. Passing measures adverse to employees in the VA will surely result in attempts to expand such bad legislation to all federal employees.

We cannot win this struggle by ourselves. There simply aren’t enough employees in SSA to be able to effectively demand that Congress stop these crippling measures. We need to work with allies and the millions of SSA customers to win this battle. We should encourage our friends and families to actively support federal employees and the programs that they administer. I truly believe that this is the most dangerous time for SSA that I have witnessed in my 44 years as an employee of the Agency and a union activist. We must act now to demand that our political leaders maintain vital social programs, properly fund those programs and treat federal employees and their representatives with respect.

I ask that you listen to the AFGE activists who visit your office and that you take action to help yourself, your family, your co-workers and the people that we service every day. Thank you.
Congress Sets Sights on the Most Vulnerable—SSI Recipients

Kathleen Romig,  
Senior Policy Analyst,  
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Dear Colleagues,

We have a new report out this morning, SSI: A Lifeline for Children with Disabilities. We wrote this because we are expecting big cuts to SSI, possibly targeting children, in both the President’s Budget and from Congressional Republicans. These cuts would come on top of the huge Medicaid cuts in the AHCA, which threaten health care, home- and community-based services, and federal special education funding for children with disabilities. (For more on that, see CAP’s great paper Cuts to Medicaid Would Harm Young Children with Disabilities, and our recent piece, Medicaid Helps Schools Help Children.)

Here is the summary:

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is the only source of federal income support targeted to families caring for children with disabilities, and it reaches only the lowest-income and most severely impaired children. These children live with conditions such as Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism, intellectual disability, and blindness. Their vulnerable families face higher costs, more demands on their time, and more insecurity than families not caring for a child with a disability. The modest income that SSI provides does not solve every problem these families face, but it reduces their struggles and helps provide the highly individualized support their children may need.

Despite the vital support SSI provides low-income children with disabilities and their families, the program could face cuts this year. House Republicans are reportedly considering substantial entitlement cuts in their budget resolution and in budget legislation later this year, potentially including cuts to SSI for children (which are targeted in the “Better Way” plan that House Republicans put forward last year).[1] That proposal would have eliminated income support for children through SSI and included vague promises to use some of the savings for “services” for these families. SSI cuts could come on top of the $839 billion Medicaid cut in the House-passed bill to repeal the Affordable Care Act, which threaten crucial health care services for children with disabilities—including those that help them succeed in school. [2] Without SSI, many more children with disabilities would be in poverty. SSI benefits lift half of otherwise-poor child beneficiaries out of poverty. Benefits particularly reduce deep poverty, lifting nearly 200,000 children with disabilities above 50 percent of the poverty line. In all, 1.2 million children with disabilities receive SSI benefits, averaging $650 a month.

Though 11 million American children have special health care needs, few meet SSI’s strict eligibility standards—either because their disabling conditions aren’t severe enough or because their families’ income and savings exceed the program’s low limits. Indeed, just 1.7 percent of all children receive SSI benefits. To qualify for SSI, a child must have a very serious condition that is backed up by medical evidence. Children’s eligibility is periodically reviewed—and many children lose eligibility after their conditions improve. For those who qualify, SSI benefits help families meet their children’s needs and make ends meet. Many children with disabilities also receive essential support through Medicaid and special education—but these services, while critical, cannot substitute for income support. SSI benefits help families pay rent and put food on the table, helping to maintain a stable home environment. They also pay for a broad range of disability-related expenses, many of which are not offered by schools or covered by insurance—things like specialized therapies, medically prescribed diets, diapers for older children, and home modifications for accessibility.

SSI benefits also allow parents to provide the care their children need. Caring for a child with a disability requires significant time and energy, requiring parents to take their children to appointments with doctors and therapists, attend meetings at school, meet intensive daily needs, and cope with all-too-common medical emergencies and illnesses. Though many parents of children receiving SSI work, working fewer hours—or even leaving the workforce—can sometimes be the best decision for a family’s health and well-being, particularly if a child’s care needs are high, and a parent’s job prospects and earnings potential are low. SSI benefits provide some of America’s most vulnerable families a stable source of income, reducing their insecurity and improving their.
After many years of anticipation (or fear), the Social Security Administration released the Supplemental Security Income internet application (iSSI) in April 2017. The iSSI application is a “limited” deferred application that collects information during the iDIB process if the applicant states that they want to apply for SSI and meet specific criteria. The limited application does not require contact with the applicant before sending the claim to DDS for a medical decision (with a few exceptions).

Each office’s case handling in the iSSI process is different. Jennifer Kirkham, a Title 16 Technical Expert in the Indianapolis downtown field office, shared that in her office the Title 2 Operations Supervisor pulls in the iSSI claims and assigns them to the Title 16 unit per alphabet breakout. She states her office is very large and so far they have received only six iSSI cases, and to her knowledge, none have been returned by DDS. She commented, “I don’t feel anyone puts the right information on the internet applications. I have completed many paper applications for SSI 3rd parties, and the attorneys do not fill those out correctly, I do not anticipate they will answer the SSI online application [questions] any differently.”

A possible benefit of the iSSI could be a reduction in the overall Title 2 disability processing time due to simultaneous receipt and DDS transfer of the iSSI and iDIB. The field office will no longer hold up the iDIB awaiting SSI application development. However, lengthy pre-effectuation review development on approved claims, because of inaccurate and incomplete iSSI information, may extend field office processing time for SSI claims all the same.

Putting the lunch back in Lunch and Learns

“Ask not what you can do for your country. Ask what’s for lunch”
–Orson Welles

August Lunch and Learn Menu

(Courtesy of Bill Lyons, AFGE Membership and Organization Director)

- Rotisserie Chicken*
- Bag of Soft Rolls
- Potato Salad
- Cookies or fresh fruit

*Ask the grocery store to cut the chicken up in hand held pieces for you.

Do you have a delicious, time and cost effective lunch and learn menu that is not pizza or subs? Send submissions to the Editor, Jessica at jmakes@yahoo.com
UNITY: What is your position with the Union and the Agency?

VP Lopez: 1st Vice President and a Claims Specialist.

UNITY: When did you first become a Union Representative?

VP Lopez: May 1989

UNITY: What was the Union like when you became a rep?

VP Lopez: When I first became a rep, there was more of a management/union interface. We were able to resolve issues utilizing an interest-based approach.

UNITY: Why did you want to become a Union Rep?

VP Lopez: I have always believed in workplace justice. As a Claims Rep, I frequently observed management violate the rights of my coworkers and ignore the collective bargaining agreement. I felt I could make a difference.

UNITY: What events have shaped you as a rep?

VP Lopez: I have learned that as a rep, management will misrepresent the facts. To prevail, I had to be prepared to defend the right of the bargaining unit. I learned the value of comprehensive discovery.

UNITY: What is your greatest accomplishment as a rep?

VP Lopez: When I assumed the leadership role as Council 147 President and 1st Vice President of Council 220, I sought to strengthen our Union by emphasizing the importance of training our representatives. As a consequence, our representatives are more prepared to defend the rights of our membership.

UNITY: How has the Union changed over the years?

VP Lopez: Over the years, our Union leaders have gotten older. We have not done a good job of attracting new talent. For our Union to thrive in the future, we need to do a better job of recruiting members that become active and supportive of our agenda.

UNITY: What is the most important issue facing our Union for the future?

VP Lopez: How to promote our goals and to protect the gains we have made through collective bargaining when the Republicans control both Houses of Congress, the Presidency and the Supreme Court. The Republican majority has made their Union animus crystal clear. Their goal is to abolish public employee unions.

UNITY: What are some of the hurdles you have faced over the years?

VP Lopez: I am an African American woman. Historically, in my Council, African American women are under represented. Over the years, the Union has changed for the better as it is now more inclusive.

UNITY: What advice can you offer to new reps?