



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SSA FIELD OPERATIONS LOCALS
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO
Representing over 25,000 Social Security Employees working in over 1,300 field installations and 36 teleservice centers across the nation, Puerto Rico and Pacific Islands

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Letters to the Editor
The New York Times
620 Eighth Ave
New York, NY 10018
Sirs:

The article entitled "Many Seeking Disability from Social Security Face Big Delays" accurately addresses a deteriorating situation in SSA caused by the failure of Congress and the President to adequately fund SSA's administrative expenses. In just the last two years staffing levels in SSA have been cut by 6000. At the same time Congress has enacted legislation assigning SSA new workloads such as Medicare prescription drugs subsidy determinations, Medicare part B premium appeals, extensive additional evidentiary requirements for issuing new and replacement Social Security cards, and No Match and e-verify workloads intended to identify undocumented immigrants. Cutting staff while increasing workloads in SSA is a recipe for disaster. Obscene processing times for disability appeals are the tip of the iceberg when analyzing SSA's failure to fulfill its legislative mandate. Integrity work such as SSI redeterminations and medical continuing disability reviews have been delayed due to inadequate staff. Thousands of SSI beneficiaries are owed retroactive Social Security disability benefits –some for as many as 33 years- yet SSA can't process these "non-priority cases". Commissioner Astrue is closing offices to save money which only results in less service for the public. The situation in SSA is an outrage and Congress should investigate.

SSA's budget woes would improve if Congress put administrative expenses for SSA off budget as are benefits. This would allow Congress to provide the resources necessary for SSA employees to do their jobs without worrying about appropriations caps. The trust fund collects substantial surpluses every year and it can afford to fund reasonable administrative expenses for the Agency.

The disability program needs reform. The current state-federal bifurcation of the disability decision making process results in a situation where approval rates differ substantially from state to state and 66% of appeals to an administrative law judge result in reversals. Can any other outcome be expected in a system where each state provides different pay and benefit packages to disability decision makers? What do we expect when disability deciders have different qualifications, experience and training depending on which state hires them? The disability program can only be cured if it is federalized. Federalizing disability decision making will result in uniform hiring criteria, training, pay, and benefits. The quality of decisions will improve at the initial claims level resulting in fewer appeals, less stress on appellate decision makers and quicker decisions.

SSA administrative expenses off budget, federalizing the disability program and in depth Congressional oversight hearings on all aspects of SSA service are the first steps needed in restoring this Agency to its previous levels of respect and efficiency.

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