



A Message from the American Federation of Government Employees

National Council of Social Security Administration Field Operations Locals

AFGE Council 220

According to the [Partnership for Public Service](#), the **Social Security Administration (SSA) is now ranked dead last in Best Places to Work**. This ranking has steadily declined since 2010, when it was ranked second.

The reason: public demand for services has increased dramatically since 2010: beneficiaries increased by almost 25%. Meanwhile, operating budgets have been slashed by 17% (with inflation) forcing hiring to go down by 50%. Employees are now feeling the stress of impossible workload demands and are deciding to leave the Agency in record numbers.

The President's SSA FY 2024 budget request recognizes that the **staffing at SSA reached a 25-year low by the end of FY 2022**. In data provided to the Union by the SSA, employee attrition rates in FY 2022 were 10% overall, 16% in the teleservice centers, and now 17% amongst new hires.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) General Committee (GC) member survey, conducted in March 2023, revealed that **53% of respondents are still considering leaving the agency within the next year**.

Why are SSA employees leaving in record numbers?

Employees are suffering mental and emotional burnout. According to the September 2022 AFGE Council 220-member survey:

- 76% stated that their overwhelmingly large workloads prevent them from performing their jobs to the best of their ability.
- 90% say they know someone that has left their job due to overwhelming work stress.
- 85% say they know a co-worker that has sought therapy or medication to deal with work stressors.
- Tragically, 8% say they know a coworker that has committed suicide linked to work-related stress.

Due to the massive increase in work and sharp decline in funding and staffing levels, the Agency and Congress continue to overload a degraded workforce by requiring them to do more with less.

For example, field office employees now do mostly intake work, with little necessary backend processing time to adjudicate cases and process the long lists of other assignments. Managers monitor Tele-Service Center employees and ask them to adhere to an average call handling time of 9.5 minutes, regardless of the caller's needs, creating an inefficient customer service model resulting in repeat customer contact.

The union represents employees in countless accusations of managers resorting to abusive tactics to control employee productivity. For example, we have reports of managers (with 1:5 and 1:6 manager to employee ratios in many offices) bullying, micromanaging, denying time off, surveilling bathroom use, invoking performance plans, and withholding career advancement because of mounting caseloads and increased public demand for services.

SSA is simply not a competitive employer. An astonishing **80% of AFGE GC survey respondents said their level of pay does not reflect the importance, complexity, and volume of work they do.** SSA employees lack benefits enjoyed by those working elsewhere such as: a guarantee to telework, remote work options, childcare subsidies, and student loan reimbursement. Since 2010, promotions within SSA have decreased by 25%. In general, Federal pay is not competitive; currently lagging by almost 24% in the private sector.

Instead, employees feel they are being treated as if they are disposable. When an employee burns out due to impossible workloads and stress, the agency only seeks to replace them.

Poor employee retention is causing public service to deteriorate. It now takes:

- **Over 7 months** on average for a customer, often facing homelessness, hunger, and economic uncertainty, to wait for an initial disability decision.
- **1/2 of the** call center calls are going unanswered due to a busy signal or because the caller becomes frustrated and hangs up while waiting.
- **4.2 million backlogged** items pending at the Payment Centers resulting in high customer general inquiry demand either by calling or walking into offices.

FACT: In the last 11 years, **100 thousand people have died** while awaiting their disability decision.

While AFGE C220 continues to sound the alarm with the agency, Congress, and the media, we continue to see an agency in denial and refusing to collaborate with AFGE to solve this historic public service, employee morale, and attrition crisis.

To get this Agency moving in the right direction, AFGE Council 220 is asking Congress and the Biden Administration to do the following:

- Fully fund SSAs operational budget to the tune of \$17.38 billion in FY24 to:
 - ✓ Restore adequate staffing and public service back to 2010 levels;
 - ✓ Make improvements to field office safety;
 - ✓ Update technology to meet modern demands;
 - ✓ Improve training;

- ✓ Give employees needed recruitment and retention pay and benefit incentives such as: childcare subsidies, student loan reimbursement, and General Service (GS) pay scale upgrades.
- Support AFGEs demand for an 8.7% pay increase for Federal workers.
- Create an Executive Order directing the establishment of Labor/Management collaborative relationships.
- Enact new leadership. Leadership should have hands-on SSA field operations job experience, and most importantly, believe in union management collaboration.

SSA's last place in Best Places to Work ranking is simply unacceptable. The SSA's new reputation demands every leader in this Nation participate in reversing the current course.

Congress must do its job to fully fund SSA's operating needs. President Biden, who has claimed to be the most labor friendly president in US history, must step in and appoint a new leader at the SSA and create a pathway for improved Labor/Management relations. As a result, we can begin to make fundamental changes from within.

We are now left with no other option, or we will continue to watch tragically as the Nation's greatest anti-poverty program further deteriorates and leaves the American people without their social safety net to rely on.

The AFGE National Council of SSA Field Operations Locals (AFGE Council 220) represents nearly 30,000 employees in SSA Field Offices, Tele-Service Centers, and Workload Support Units nationwide.

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