

## **AFGE Social Security Workers United - Hill Visit Talking Points**

### **Congressional Appropriations Committee Meetings**

#### **Opening Statement**

"I'm here representing 40,000 frontline and support Social Security workers through AFGE Social Security Workers United. Your constituents are experiencing unprecedented delays in Social Security services due to a critical staffing crisis that threatens the program they've paid into their entire working lives."

#### **The Crisis in Numbers**

##### **SSA is at a 58-year staffing low while serving an all-time high number of beneficiaries:**

- The last time SSA had this few staff was 1967, when the agency served 480 beneficiaries per staff member
- Now in 2025, SSA is attempting to serve 1,480 beneficiaries per staff member - **more than triple the workload**
- 7,000 workers are expected to be cut between FY25 and FY26
- 2,000 frontline staff took buyouts in March without staffing assessments
- 1,000-4,000 (1/2 the CSRs) (do percentage of field office workers) 5-10% were reassigned to the 800 number in July 2025
- Only 8.9% of calls are answered in less than 20 minutes
- Wait times fluctuate wildly—from 18.5 minutes to 2 hours 50 minutes

##### **SSA's own data (before it was removed from SSA.gov) shows measurable service decline in 2025:**

- Claims completion rates dropped from 94.4% (2024) to 88.7% (2025) - a 5.7 percentage point decline
- Timely appointment scheduling (within 28 days) declined from 44% to 43%
- Pending claims increased by 72.4%, rising from 346,277 to 597,022
- This increase occurred while online claim filing increased to 64% (up 4% from 2024). Yet for every claim filed online, it takes an employee to process.

#### **Your Constituents Are Paying the Price**

##### **Real impacts on the people you represent:**

- Months-long waits for field office appointments
- Multi-hour phone wait times to reach a human agent
- Processing delays for disability claims and benefit applications
- Increased risk of improper payments due to rushed automation
- Seniors and disabled individuals forced to navigate complex systems without adequate human support

**Your constituents want human service, not automation:**

- Alliance for Retired Americans polling of 1,000 registered voters (ages 60-80) shows field office access is the #1 concern - even above solvency
- Social Security Works polling reveals younger people surprisingly prefer to visit local offices over online-only service
- Focus groups consistently hear: "I've paid for it, it's mine, I need it, pay me" - demonstrating strong ownership mentality
- Voters across all demographics reject offices being replaced with online-only service
- The public wants real people, not AI, handling their earned benefits
- \*\*\*Automation assists workers but does not replace

**Policy changes in 2025 created systemic operational problems:**

- In-person ID proofing requirements increased field office workload and increased the number of pending claim and processing times
- Suspending enumeration beyond entry added complexity
- More wrongful death termination cases requiring manual processing
- End of hybrid telework, flexible work schedules, and buyouts forced staff departures
- Appointment Focus Service compressed processing times and eliminated pre-interview preparation and post interview claims completion
- Loss of 3,000 workers (2,000 from field offices) - a 10% reduction in field office staff
- Systems crashes and DOGE-related disruptions reduced processing time
- Result: Double-booking of appointments, compressed appointment times, exhausted workers managing increased intake without time for completion

## **The "Robbing Peter to Pay Paul" Problem**

### **SSA's current approach is unsustainable:**

- Moving field office staff to answer phones allegedly improves one metric (though with no method or methodology transparency and historical comparison left on SSA.gov) while devastating local service – all while hiding the stats.
- It's like reassigning hospital nurses from patient care to answer phones—who then cares for the patients?
- Automation cannot replace the complexity, human compassion, and expertise needed for Social Security services, and there is no proof that self-service at SSA is what constituents prefer.
- Your constituents deserve fully staffed operations at both the national 800 number AND local field offices and all components of SSA
- SSA removed many key data points from their website (like: historical data to track improvements and apples to apples comparisons, customer satisfaction metrics by service type, field office metrics, and current wait time to speak to an agent on the 800#) so public and congressional oversight is hard to accomplish.
- SSA has moved to an appointment focused service model so while their newest press release claims a lobby wait time reduction of mere minutes, it is most likely because what could have been accomplished by waiting for same day service now requires an appointment and it takes on average over 35 days (about 1 month 9 days) to get an appointment according to SSAs own data on SSA.gov

Former SSA Commissioner Michael Astrue (2007-2013) argued at the NASI Social Security 90th Birthday celebration in July, that complete data transparency is essential for bipartisan cooperation and informed Social Security policy debates.

He stated in a speech at the event, "Something that I think we can all get behind is more, transparency. I think we can get behind [ensuring] that those numbers are honest and accurate and up front so that we can have an intelligent debate. Because unless we can all really agree on the numbers, we can't have a principled debate."

Michael J. Astrue served as the 15th Commissioner of the Social Security Administration from 2007 to 2013 - a 6-year term under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

### **SSA's FY 2026 budget request abandons 90 years of community-based service:**

- The FY 26 Congressional Justification budget explicitly plans to move away from community-based service toward a centralized agency with appointment and call sharing happening statewide and nationally
- This directly contradicts SSA's 90-year tradition of providing constituents choice in how they receive service
- **From the worker perspective, this creates chaos, confusion, and long service delays**
- **Our systems and policies are not built for this centralized approach - it is not efficient**
- Budget priorities show continued starving of local offices while investing in unproven centralization
- Degradation of the community-based case worker service option that many constituents prefer.
- **Your constituents in your communities deserve a choice** in how they want to be served - this choice has defined Social Security for nine decades

#### **This trajectory will continue harming your communities:**

- Longer wait times for benefits and services in your district as appointments get shuffled nationally
- Citizens in your communities will continue falling through the social safety net
- Local economic impact as field offices lose resources and potentially close
- Elimination of the personal, community connection that has made Social Security trusted for 90 years

#### **Fiscal Responsibility Argument**

##### **SSA delivers exceptional value that Congress should protect:**

- SSA operates at less than 1% administrative costs (compared to 20% in the private sector insurance industry)
- For 90 years, SSA has provided exceptional value and expertise
- Your constituents have "bought and paid for" timely service through payroll taxes
- Understaffing creates false economies that lead to more expensive problems later

#### **Specific Asks for Appropriations Committee Members**

##### **Immediate Actions Needed:**

### **1. Hold Congressional Hearings on SSA Operations**

1. Hold hearings and invite AFGE members at SSA as witnesses to examine the true state of declining service quality and employee morale in SSA operations.

### **2. Demand Data Transparency on Performance Metrics**

1. Require transparency regarding performance metrics and the methods used to obtain data, especially concerning:
  1. National 800-number wait times
  2. Field office wait times for lobby service, appointments and benefit delivery
  3. Internet claims processing capabilities with severely reduced staff (every internet claim still needs a worker to process it to completion)
  4. Technology plans that replace workers and deny the public choice in how SSA serves them

### **3. Hold SSA Leadership Accountable**

1. Hold SSA leadership accountable for degrading employee morale, staffing levels, and service quality that has left SSA unable to adequately and timely serve the American people.

### **4. Support Adequate Staffing and Funding**

1. Support comprehensive staffing assessments and appropriate funding levels to rebuild SSA's workforce to sustainable levels. This should restore public trust through:
  1. Customer choice of service
  2. Community-based access
  3. Timely benefit and service delivery
  4. Customer satisfaction

### **Funding Priorities:**

- **Hire immediately** to fill critical gaps in field offices and teleservice centers and regional support and IT.
- **Restore respect** for SSA workers through competitive compensation and working conditions
- **Invest in training** for new hires while retaining experienced staff
- **Stop the staff exodus** by addressing arbitrary reassignments and the elimination of flexible schedules and work at home options

- **Properly fund the Administrative costs** by restoring SSAs historic 1.2% of benefit outlay funding (develop the argument)

## **Addressing Counterarguments**

### **"Automation will solve the problem":**

- 30-40% of calls allegedly handled by automation, but no customer satisfaction data provided
- Many automated actions require follow-up human contact anyway
- Seniors and disabled individuals often distrust automation and need human assistance
- First call resolution rates are unclear and likely poor
- **Polling shows your constituents reject automation over human service**
- **\*\*\*AI not sufficient to replace human judgement: quote NASI report**

### **"We need to modernize":**

- Technology should supplement, not replace, human expertise
- SSA's clientele requires compassionate, trained federal workers
- Private contractors cannot provide the same level of vetting, training, and accountability
- **Alliance for Retired Americans polling shows field office access is voters' #1 concern - above even solvency**

### **"Young people prefer online service":**

- Social Security Works polling actually shows younger people surprisingly prefer visiting local offices
- Even digital proficient users unfamiliar with SSAs complex program want and need human interaction for complex benefit issues
- In 2024 Online filing increased 4% but timely service and quality declined - proving technology alone doesn't work

## **The Choice for Congress**

### **Your constituents deserve to choose their service:**

- Fully staffed, vetted, well-trained federal workforce accountable for protecting private information

- OR inferior AI chatbots and expensive private contractors with unverified training

**Polling proves what your constituents want:**

- "I've paid for it, it's mine, I need it, pay me" - the ownership mentality is strong across all demographics
- Field office access ranks as the #1 concern for seniors (ages 60-80) - even above solvency issues
- Voters reject replacing offices with online-only service
- The public wants real people, not AI, handling their earned benefits – can you blame them?

**This is their money. They've earned timely, accurate service and deserve a choice in how they receive it.**

**Call to Action**

**We're asking for your leadership to:**

- 1) **Participate in SSA's 90th Anniversary Events** Congress should participate in the Social Security Administration's 90th birthday celebrations across the country. These events will celebrate SSA's anniversary and advocate for keeping the program strong for current and future generations. We invite Congress to have AFGE members at SSA speak at or attend their planned events.
- 2) **Hold Congressional Hearings on SSA Operations** Hold hearings and invite AFGE members at SSA as witnesses to examine the true state of declining service quality, staffing, and employee morale in SSA operations.
- 3) **Demand Data Transparency on Performance Metrics** Require transparency regarding performance metrics and the methods used to obtain data, especially concerning:
  - a) National 800-number wait times
  - b) Field office wait times for lobby service, appointments, and benefit delivery
  - c) Internet claims processing capabilities with severely reduced staff (every internet claim still needs a worker to process it to completion)
  - d) Technology plans that replace workers and deny the public choice in how SSA serves them

Demand that SSA resumes the routine submission of the following unedited and unredacted reports to the House Oversight Committee:

- a) Weekly performance reports
- b) Reports from the Field Office optimizer tool; which shows how many staff there are in offices and ratios to customers, wait times for every service, as well as underperforming offices.

- 4) **Hold SSA Leadership Accountable and Ask for Proof of Contracts** Hold SSA leadership accountable for degrading employee morale, staffing levels, and service quality that has left SSA unable to adequately and timely serve the American people.

Audit all SSA contracts and plans to contract out federal jobs at SSA that will ultimately cost more, degrade public trust and service, expose personal data to harm, and lose institutional knowledge and expertise.

- 5) **Support Adequate Staffing and Funding** Support comprehensive staffing assessments and appropriate funding levels to rebuild SSA's workforce to sustainable levels. This should restore public trust through:
- a) Customer choice of service
  - b) Community-based access
  - c) Timely benefit and service delivery
  - d) Customer satisfaction

AFGE at SSA recommends Congress require SSA to hire 20,000 to 30,000 more workers in field offices, teleservice centers, and support staff to begin digging SSA out of historical backlogs and long service delays your constituents are facing in communities.

**The workers are ready to serve—we just need Congress to give us the resources to do it properly, hold the agency accountable to your constituents, and reject the elimination of community-based service that has served America for 90 years.**

### **Closing Statement**

"Social Security Workers Are Social Security Strong. We're asking for your support so we can continue serving your constituents with the dignity and expertise they deserve. This isn't just about worker rights—it's about protecting the social safety net that defines American values."

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### **Key Statistics to Remember:**

- 40,000 AFGE members represented

- 58-year staffing low (last seen in 1967)
- **1,480 beneficiaries per staff member** in 2025 vs. 480 in 1967
- All-time high beneficiary numbers
- 7,000 –10,000 workers expected to be cut over a 1-year period
- Less than 1% administrative costs
- 90 years of successful service delivery
- **72.4% increase in pending claims** (346,277 to 597,022)
- **5.7 percentage point drop** in claims completion rates
- **10% reduction** in field office staff in 2025