AFGE Council 220
National Council of SSA
Field Operations Locals

Fiscal Year 2023
Requests to Congress
&
Agency Policy Recommendations
On behalf of the 26,500 federal workers who serve 63 million Social Security recipients every day at a collective 1,200 field offices, teleservice centers, and workload support units, AFGE Council 220 is sounding a dire warning: the Social Security Administration is in crisis.

Overloaded workers are plotting exit strategies and leaving in droves, contributing to the ongoing shortage of 4,000 frontline workers and a subsequent mounting case backlog. The quarterly Pulse survey reflects this steep decline in morale and accurately depicts our employee engagement and morale among the lowest across the federal workforce.

The Federal News Network reports that the Agency’s current workforce of fewer than 60,000 employees is at a 25-year low—even as the number of Social Security beneficiaries has grown by more than 10 million over the past decade.

Acting Commissioner Kilolo Kijakazi has acknowledged that the Social Security Administration (SSA) and state Disability Determination Service (DDS) offices are expected to lose an additional 6,000 employees in fiscal year 2023.

Long lines and excruciating wait times for those seeking our services are a direct result of the staffing crisis. Without adequate funding, competitive remote work options, pay and benefit incentives, improved training, improved employee morale, policy changes, and technology upgrades—Congress and SSA will have missed a vital opportunity to modernize, address recruitment and retention issues, and in turn, make SSA programs more accessible to the American public.

The Agency’s failure to leverage technology, policy change, telework and remote work to provide quality service to the public is unconscionable. We serve the most vulnerable populations of our society and should utilize every tool at our disposal to minimize the amount of time they spend, and the risk of exposure they endure, seeking our help.

The Agency claims to care about employee morale, high-quality customer service, and efficient service delivery. However, employee morale is at an all-time low, while customers continue to endure long wait times for service. The Agency is in a full-fledged crisis. Now is the time for the Agency and Union to work together and find solutions that prioritize both high-quality customer service and improved employee morale.

A truly collaborative approach between labor and management is essential to reversing our course. As it stands, there is no trust between the Union and the Office of Labor-Management and Employee Relations. Union requests are routinely ignored, information is misconstrued to Agency leadership, and Union leaders are misled. If the Agency leadership is sincere in their intent to respect the rights of workers, we need change.

In the following pages, AFGE Council 220 identifies four specific asks of Congress, aimed at improving customer service and ensuring the American people receive prompt, prepared assistance with their claims. We also provide recommendations for the Agency to improve operations and the state of Union-Management relations.
Jessica LaPointe
AFGE Council 220
President
lapointe4c220@gmail.com

Sherry Jackson
AFGE Council 220
2nd Vice President of Labor Relations
Legislative Coordinator
area1afge@gmail.com

Jeff Cruz
AFGE Legislative Department
Jeff.cruz@afge.org
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Requests of Congress
Congress should secure additional funding for SSA to provide quality service to the American public.

In 2021, the Agency operated with 4,000 fewer field office and teleservice center employees than it did 12 years ago, a deepening decline that currently sits at 13%. At the same time, the number of beneficiaries has increased by 21%, from 59.2 million beneficiaries in 2010 to 69.8 million in 2021.

In other words, we are serving 10 million more people with 4,000 fewer employees. Asking employees to manage 117% of the caseload level from 2010 with just 87% of the staff is unreasonable. This lopsided change creates pressure that ultimately erodes employee morale and is the leading cause of employee departures.

AFGE’s financial request is for $16.5 billion in emergency funding for FY 23.

For FY 2023, the House and Senate have approved a Continuing Resolution through December 16, 2022 with a historic $400 million yearly increase in funding levels ($100 million until the end of the year). This is an encouraging step, but with current inflation, the net impact is negligible. This will most likely still trigger a hiring freeze, limit overtime, and further exacerbate the attrition crisis.

According to the Commissioner, without the President Biden’s proposed $800 million infusion, the Agency will be forced to cut overtime levels at SSA by 60%, and at State DDS by 50%, creating significantly longer wait times. Applicants for an initial disability claim now wait on average six months for a decision, an already all-time high.

We are requesting a $1.726 billion increase above President Biden’s budget request of $14.773 billion for FY 23. We believe this should be earmarked in the following:

1. Payroll: 60%, with this line item dedicated to staffing full-time equivalents back to FY 2010 levels;

2. DDS: 18%, dedicated to reducing state backlogs;

3. Security: 11%, dedicated to increased hiring of guards as well as the costs of security screening and safety prevention tools such as magnetometers, scanning wands, barriers and bollards;

4. IT modernization: 11%.
Congress should create a student loan reimbursement program as an important recruitment and retention tool.

Morale at SSA is exceedingly low, consistently ranked in the Pulse and other surveys as one of the worst federal agencies to work for. SSA has an aging workforce and will see many of its most experienced workers retire over the next few years. It is also one of the few agencies that does not participate in the student loan repayment program.

AFGE encourages Congress to provide funds for a student loan repayment benefit as part of increased SSA funding. AFGE estimates that this proven recruitment and retention benefit would cost around $8.5 million a year.

Jeff Cruz, AFGE Legislative Department

Congress must act to increase wages for public servants.

At the end of August, President Biden announced plans to give civilian federal employees a 4.1% across-the-board increase and 0.5% average locality pay increase. This 4.6% total pay raise will take effect January 1, 2023. Taking this into consideration, AFGE continues to fight for a more significant pay increase for federal workers to remedy the pay discrepancy between federal workers and their private sector counterparts—22.47% in 2021, according to internal reports.

Congress designed the 1990 Federal Employee Pay Comparability Act (FEPCA) to pay federal workers based on the local labor market. Since then, Congress and the White House have allowed federal workers’ pay to fall drastically behind.

Federal employees are unique because we are an organized workforce that cannot negotiate its own wages. We cannot strike for wage increases or better working conditions: we can only petition Congress and the President to make significant changes to set an example for the private sector workforce to stabilize the economy.

The 2022 annual inflation rate in August was 8.3%. Simply to keep up with the cost of living in America, employees need an additional 3.7% pay increase. To reach their peers in the private sector, employees need much more.

We are asking Congress for $1.035 billion beyond the President’s appropriation request to provide salary increases at SSA.

Elizabeth Labelle, AFGE C220 Denver Regional Vice President, AFGE Local 4012 President
President Biden should nominate and Congress should act to confirm a commissioner and deputy commissioner.

Social Security just celebrated its 87th birthday. Unconfirmed leadership lacks the authority to make the fundamental changes SSA requires. The nomination and confirmation of a commissioner and deputy commissioner, ready to protect workers from burnout and the American people from further program deterioration, would send a clear message that Social Security is, indeed, a valued and protected institution.
Agency Policy Recommendations
SSA should request a special rate of pay and additional recruitment and retention pay incentives for the bargaining unit occupations in Field Operations.

SSA can increase the pay rate of occupations in every geographical location nationwide when they experience recruitment and retention problems. With current record high staffing losses and a 12-year increase in demand for services, the stress from mounting workloads and public frustration is causing employees to quit in record numbers. SSA particularly struggles to recruit and retain in the occupation of Customer Service Representative (CSR) and Lead Customer Service Representative (LCSR) in the Teleservice Centers (TSCs) and Field Offices (FOs) because the GS-8 and GS-9 pay for these roles are not competitive.

Agency data shows the attrition rate of CSRs in TSCs is 24% and growing (compared to 20% in well-managed call centers in private industry). Without enough CSRs and LCSRs to manage the frontline general inquiry and enumeration traffic in the TSCs and FOs, Claims Specialists (CSs) and Technical Experts (TEs) face burnout because they are forced to do general inquiry and enumeration work for the majority of their work week, in addition to their primary claims processing, post-adjudication, and program integrity workloads. This exhaustion is driving historic attrition rates amongst CSs and TEs in the FOs, as well.

Furthermore, Agency data shows CSRs in TSCs leave the Agency after an average of just five years due to burnout, non-competitive pay and benefits, and a lack of upward mobility.

In an email sent to employees on September 2, 2022 titled “Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Update,” Acting Commissioner Kilolo Kijakazi gave a further grim prognosis, “We can expect that we will lose nearly 6,000 SSA and DDS employees in FY 2023, and we will not be able to replace them without the anomaly funding, which will place additional burden on you.”

The request for a special rate and other recruitment and retention incentives are not a heavy lift for OPM or the Agency as it is already included in the SSA Personnel and Policy Manual and the Agency can absorb the cost. We are calling on Acting Commissioner Kijakazi to request these pay incentives for bargaining unit occupations as an anecdote for record staffing shortages at SSA.

SSA should commit to fully utilizing remote work as a recruitment and retention tool in Teleservice Centers and Workload Support Units.

Of the 32,000 AFGE Council 220 employees, roughly 5,000 work in 22 Teleservice Centers (TSCs) and four Workload Support Units (WSUs) nationwide, a veritable lifeline to the American people. These employees successfully worked fully remote throughout the pandemic, and have fully portable workloads, yet the Agency now demands TSC and WSU employees still report to an office one day a week.

If the TSCs and WSUs were converted to fully remote jobs, the Agency could save on rent and overhead, increase employees’ disposable income, and reduce its carbon footprint. The average TSC employee (GS 5-9) makes about $31,000 to $47,000 a year at step 1. Most TSCs are in high-traffic metropolitan areas. Saving on commuting and other expenses, like before-and after-school care for school-age children, would be a significant raise for employees and lead to fewer emissions from their commutes.

According to the Agency, TSC attrition is historically high right now. If the Agency offered a fully remote work option for TSC and WSU employees, they would be able to better recruit and retain employees who are taking opportunities to work elsewhere for better pay and benefits.
SSA should utilize technology and policy changes to better streamline service.

In 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 14058 calling on each federal agency to take advantage of existing technology to “transform (the) federal customer experience and service delivery to rebuild trust in government.” As the Agency tasked with administering Social Security to millions of elderly and disabled Americans, SSA should be on the forefront of making its service more accessible and convenient.

To accomplish this important goal, SSA should work with the Union to maximize the productivity and impact of telework, consistent with the highest quality service to the public, including the choice of whether to contact the Agency in person, by phone, or online.

To create the best outcome for both the customers needing help and the employees providing it, SSA should explore technology like video service delivery and policy shifts regarding the delivery of original documents and wet signatures.

The Union proposes the following policy changes:

1. That beneficiaries be offered the ability and choice to start, stop, or change voluntary tax withholding online through their mySSA accounts;

2. That the Agency utilize an existing interfacing query to verify lawful presence so that claimants do not need to send in their permanent residence card to verify alien status. Instead, claimants could simply verbally provide their alien registration number. The interface with Immigration through the SAVE query would gather their immigration status, date granted, and either end date or indefinite status;

3. Match the policy regarding proof of age tolerance for citizens and claimants with lawful alien status. As it stands, claimants who are citizens do not need to provide proof of age when they apply for benefits because existing Agency records already contain date of birth information. Non-citizens have the same records established with SSA; they should be afforded the same tolerance.

These policy changes are a sampling of proposals the Union has put forward that would provide a better-quality service experience for claimants and beneficiaries and would make providing customer service more efficient and accessible.

Angela Digeronimo, AFGE C220 New York Regional Vice President, AFGE Local 2369 President
SSA should enhance security in field offices.

Gun violence, including mass shootings, has become a fixture of American life. The Union has repeatedly requested that the Deputy Commissioner of Operation’s office equip SSA field offices with magnetometers or guards with scanning wands. To date, the request has not been granted. SSA field offices remain vulnerable to domestic terrorism, violent and deadly outbreaks because security measures are inadequate.

In 2012, then-Commissioner Michael Astrue concluded a pilot program of enhanced security. The results of the pilot depicted the following:

- The number of prohibited items decreased by almost 75%;
- Examples of items found by metal detectors: firearms, pepper spray, knives, stun guns, razor blades, scissors, spike-tipped walking stick, wine opener, torch lighter, screwdriver, “cat-eye” masks, methamphetamine;
- Visitors were not deterred from entering SSA offices with heightened security features;
- Late or missed appointments did not increase;
- Office wait times went down or remained the same;
- Overall, employees, management, and visitors had positive attitudes and supported security efforts.

During the pilot, approximately 80 of the 1,200 SSA field offices were equipped with magnetometers, most of which are still in place today. The Union is asking SSA to equip EVERY field office nationwide with metal detectors or security guards with handheld scanning wands and updated post orders to require guards to screen every customer who enters the building. This is on par with the security already provided to every SSA Office of Disability Adjudication and Review.

Furthermore, at the end of August, yet another vehicle operator drove into an SSA building. The Union also demands that SSA inventory all buildings and install barriers or bollards surrounding all offices where deficient.
SSA should use the granting of Reasonable Accommodations (RA) and Temporary Compassionate Assignment (TCA) requests to help retain high-quality employees.

Employees with disabilities and caregivers need better protections to stay productive in their SSA careers. An employee’s leave increases when they are denied RA and TCA requests. Well-trained, seasoned employees with disabilities and caregiving responsibilities are also choosing to leave their careers to work for other federal agencies and the private sector to take advantage of better workplace flexibilities such as liberal RA and TCA practices. To be a model employer, or even an average one, SSA needs to be more flexible in these areas.

In 2015, the Social Security Administration settled a class action EEO complaint in which the Agency was charged with discrimination against disabled employees in many aspects of their employment. The mishandling of employee RA requests was included as a subject of their discriminating behavior.

As a result, the Agency was ordered to establish a formal reasonable accommodation process to properly address disabled employees’ needs so they could continue to perform the essential functions of their jobs. The formal reasonable accommodation process was established in February 2017 as the Reasonable Accommodation Program, located in the Personnel Policy Manual, S1630_1.

Effective with the announcement of employee re-entry from the mandatory COVID19 quarantine, individual employees began reporting issues with their RA requests. The Agency has engaged in actions that violate its own formal reasonable accommodation process.

Once again, SSA is potentially engaging in discriminatory behavior towards disabled employees. We brought our findings to the Agency in March of this year. The Agency denied the discrimination accusations, and nothing has changed.

As a result, employees are faced with risking their health to report onsite to their offices or using their limited leave to stay safe. An employee who is forced to use leave instead of working from home is one less employee available to perform essential duties that support the mission of our Agency.

This potentially discriminatory behavior has further led to the decline in employee morale, increased mental health issues, and a greater number of resignations.

*Monique Buchanan, C220 EEO Committee Chair*

TCA is covered under Article 27, Section 10 of the CBA. It provides for employees to request an assignment to another SSA facility in a different geographical location for temporary personal situations, such as illness of a parent, etc. While the Agency originally agreed to allow employees that were granted a TCA to work from their home or the home of an extended family member in need of care as an alternate duty station (ADS), the Agency has since claimed that an ADS is not an SSA facility and have been denying TCA requests.
The Agency's insistence on denying these requests has caused low morale. As a result, employees are either considering leaving Federal service for private sector employment, accepting positions with other Agencies that offer the option to telework five days a week, or retiring.

*Angela Digeronimo, C220 New York Regional Vice President, AFGE Local 2369 President*

**SSA should implement a robust, permanent telework program that employees can depend upon to improve productivity, recruitment, retention, and morale.**

The Agency's biggest challenge now is in the recruitment of quality candidates and retention of employees. Qualified applicants are routinely turning down job offers from SSA. Their top reason for turning down the offer is that they are not offered work/life flexibility. Applicants and current employees seek a robust telework program.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, SSA employees worked remotely for nearly two years, with high productivity, and without the systems improvements, technology, and favorable policy changes that are still needed to maximize the benefit of this tool.

A robust telework program would also assist with attracting and retaining employees with children. Our Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) provides, in Article 20, Section 5, that the Agency will utilize programs which may assist employees with child/elder care needs; for example, through part-time employment, job sharing, leave, flextime, etc. The etc. can clearly encompass full-time telework.

The Agency appears unwilling to provide this work/life flexibility for employees. Employees who worked at home during the pandemic experienced an increase in quality of life. Teleworking parents could attend after-school sports events with their children. They could have their children come home after school, saving on child care expenses. For employees who are interested in working from home, telework has been a life-changing option.

The Agency must reopen Article 41 of our contract that governs telework and implement a permanent telework program.

The Agency announced on Sept. 9, that it is keeping most current telework flexibilities in place until March 31, 2023. However, based on the lack of telework protections and guarantees in our CBA, telework as a flexible workplace benefit for SSA employees could end at any moment. The uncertainty of the future of telework and the absence of a robust telework program is impeding recruitment and retention.
SSA should increase adjudication time, managerial anti-bullying training, and leave flexibility, to reduce employee burnout.

In January 2013, then-Commissioner Astrue reduced field office hours, including having all field offices close at noon on Wednesdays. This allowed employees time to complete casework without interruption. Employees valued this dedicated time to produce accurate and timely work, which resulted in better service to the public and better results on performance evaluations, and less overall stress and anxiety.

In January 2020, the Agency reopened on Wednesday afternoons, eliminating essential adjudication time. Without dedicated time to complete work, case backlogs quickly grew, and employee morale declined.

Results of a recent AFGE survey show:

- 98% of employees surveyed indicated that the elimination of Wednesday afternoon adjudication time had an adverse impact on their ability to meet management’s expectations for timeliness and accuracy;
- 98% of employees said the elimination increased their stress and anxiety at work;
- 93% said they are trying to make up for the lost time by working through breaks and lunches;
- 77% said the loss of dedicated time each week contributed to lowering their performance evaluation scores.

As a replacement for Wednesday adjudication time, many SSA managers now resort to micromanaging and excessive monitoring as an attempt to keep employees on task. Performance plans and discipline are heavy-handed, instead of offering training and support measures. Unrealistic expectations, micromanaging, microaggressions, violations of employee/human rights, bullying, and harassment have become far too common.

To make matters worse, to address workload demands, managers deny Reasonable Accommodations, Temporary Compassionate Assignments, the ability to go part time or take FMLA, and other annual and sick leave. It is not the employees’ fault that Congress and SSA have not allocated enough funding for staff, overtime, and dedicated processing time to meet the needs of the American public.

Burnout is a driving force of attrition due to the overstressed, overworked, low-morale, and unreasonable expectations in SSA offices. This is also causing employees to seek mental health and medical treatment and go on medication to control stress and stress related illness.
When a workplace environment is beyond burnout, the consequences could in fact be deadly. Tragically, some employees have opted to commit suicide due to mental and emotional health deterioration or exacerbation of preexisting conditions.

SSA employees must be given the resources and tools they need to provide superb service to the American people. This includes adequate staff and time to perform the jobs they are being asked to do. Furthermore, SSA managers need mandatory anti-bullying training in order to create a workplace culture that respects the value of every individual, and enforced consequences for not doing so. Let’s bring dignity back to the workplace. Let’s save lives today before it’s too late.

Jennifer Ramirez-Serano, AFGE C220 Health and Safety Committee

SSA should improve veteran recruitment and retention at SSA.

Under the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA) of 1998, as amended, agencies allow veterans to compete for job opportunities that are not offered to other external candidates. Even with VEOA, SSA struggles to recruit veterans because our telework program and pay is not competitive.

While VEOA helps draw veterans into service at SSA, it does not provide for their retention. That is SSA’s responsibility.

Based on information we received from the Agency, we now know that from October 2014 to June 30, 2022, SSA hired 8,211 vets. Of that number, 2,132 resigned and 1,291 were terminated, meaning 42% of veterans hired by SSA in that time are no longer with the Agency.

Years of analysis and review have also found that too many managers lack the soft skills, patience, empathy, and knowledge necessary for veterans to thrive in their SSA careers.

There are tangible and intangible ways to move forward. Tangibly, there is a list of veterans’ benefits that SSA managers should address precisely within the first 90 days of employment. We have found that when these tangible benefits are addressed timely and correctly, it contributes to improved job satisfaction for veterans and retention.

Some of the key tangible benefits are:

1. Military Buy-Back, which impacts service comp date and retirement benefits;

2. Correct Service-Comp Date, which impacts leave accrual amount;

3. GI Bill benefits that allows newly-hired Vets to receive their SSA pay, as well as additional pay from the VA during their training;
4. Reasonable Accommodations (RA): Informing veterans about this option and assisting them in the process so that they have any and all necessary assistance while at work;

5. FMLA: Fully informing veterans about the benefits of this option, a similar protection as the RA benefit;

6. Leave: Automatically available for newly-hired veterans for medical appointments;

7. Veteran Website: A one-stop site for veterans to access updated information about "all things SSA veteran." SSA needs to keep this updated, because, for example, it is currently lacking information about Military Buy-Back—veterans, Union representatives, and managers rely on this site; therefore, SSA needs to ensure that it stays current and updated.

Here are some of the intangible ways SSA can better retain vets.

Managers need to be better equipped with soft skills, patience, empathy, and knowledge with how to treat a veteran in the workplace. Those values can go a long way with all employees. However, they are especially important when it comes to veterans. Veterans are entering the civilian workforce at SSA with service-connected mental and physical disabilities. Many of them are coming to SSA from recent combat service, and even those who are not are still coming to SSA from the military environment, which requires a management approach that is welcoming and supportive. The Union believes that we all owe the extra effort to America's heroes to accommodate their needs in the workplace. Instead, it is too often the case that SSA managers are unprofessional and unkind to their vet employees.

It is also necessary that SSA and Congress should act to ensure that even if a veteran should leave the Agency, his employment record remains unblemished. Barring any legal violations, veterans should be able to leave SSA and pursue any and all other jobs as veterans in good standing.

Amad Ali, AFGE C220 Veteran Committee Chair, AFGE Local 3571 President
SSA should agree to fully reopen our 2019 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) and the Office of Labor Management Employee Relations (OLMER) needs to negotiate in good faith.

On May 25, 2018, three Executive Orders were signed into law by President Trump designed to eviscerate the federal workforce and the labor Unions that represent them. While these executive orders were eventually enjoined by the federal courts, and fully rescinded through President Biden’s Executive Order 14003, these Executive Orders continue to be the template for the Agency’s disposition towards AFGE.

SSA’s Office of Labor Management Relations (OLMER) leadership recently engaged the Union in settlement discussions for the purpose of resolving litigation and creating a pilot program regarding the expansion of telework for SSA’s Bargaining Unit Employees (BUE). These settlement discussions and telework expansion talks failed when it became clear OLMER was focused on pressuring the Union to settle a large number of cases without reaching a productive consensus.

Furthermore, the Trump Executive Orders precipitated an onerous Collective Bargaining Agreement that the Union was forced to sign under duress. The agreement directly undercuts employee morale and retention by:

- Limiting Weingarten protections;
- Reducing length of performance plans;
- Eliminating the employee vision program;
- Creating a more stringent leave policy;
- Securing no guarantees to employees’ right to telework.

The agreement should have been re-bargained under the authority of Executive Order 14003. While SSA complied with the Trump Executive Orders with lightning-fast expediency, it is slow walking or all but ignoring President Biden’s directives.

BUEs are more detached from their duties than ever before. This sense of alienation is compounded by the potential loss of telework. If morale and retention are not addressed immediately, we anticipate a further mass exodus that will continue to cripple SSA and its ability to serve the American public.

If we are to stem the tide, we must be able to have a legitimate partnership with SSA leadership that is motivated to improve its way of doing business and is consistent with the best labor practices of today.

Additionally, the Agency has only agreed to reopen six articles of our 2019 Trump inspired contract and has refused the renegotiation of the most significant articles that have vitiated BUE protections and rights. Despite this, the Union continues to push for a full reopening of our CBA.

*Edwin Osorio, AFGE C220 1st Vice President of Labor Relations, AFGE Local 3369 President*
SSA must improve its training process for both new hires and the ongoing development of current employees.

The Agency’s failure to properly train results in wasteful spending on recruitment and training, which does not yield productive employees. New hire training should ensure an understanding of the Agency’s complex programs.

The Agency’s training models are antiquated and do not equip new employees with the proper tools and knowledge to achieve high rates of proficiency. Many trainees each year resign during training or do not successfully progress through training.

New employees report that they are, at times, bullied by management if they do not progress at a rapid pace. Some employees are disciplined because of inadequate training. Many new hires are thrown into fast-paced office environments with disgruntled customers before they have all the tools and knowledge to do their job well.

Failing training models for new hires, and a lack of ongoing training and promotional opportunities for Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) in Teleservice Centers (TSCs), is contributing to record-low staffing, with current attrition at 24%. The Agency has announced a “training vision,” the primary goal of which is to reduce the overall time it takes for a trainee to be independent on the phone, while ensuring top-notch customer service.

Despite this stated goal, the Agency continues to train TSC employees to have scripted robotic responses to customer questions and are not encouraged to think independently. The Agency then reports achievement of this “vision” by serving up misleading statistics based on short call times and not on resolving callers’ issues.

Another shortcoming with the Agency’s training model is that it does not take into consideration individual learning styles. Everyone does not learn concepts in the same manner or time frame, and SSA does not include sound educational principles in their training model.

SSA also does not provide enough ongoing training of current employees to advance in their careers. Agency data shows the average career expectancy for a CSR in the TSC is five years. By not investing enough time and resources in training throughout employees’ careers, the Agency fails to support its most valuable resource—its workforce.

The Union is promoting an optional virtual training model which would utilize technology and telework while prioritizing individual development of program knowledge. This would enable trainees to make informed decisions on how to service each individual caller’s concerns.

The Union agrees with having some training via live video, along with incorporating self-paced instruction; however, the Agency should make trainers and mentors more available to provide answers to questions, resources, and real-life examples of how to best address more difficult customer concerns. This hands-on classroom style approach to training can easily be achieved in a virtual training environment. This would lead to better learning and retention of information.
Well trained staff will improve the morale and retention of the best and the brightest workforce. When the Agency cuts corners in training new hires they fail to build a solid foundation for employees to grow in their career. Sacrificing training that results in a lack of upward mobility throughout an employee’s career is short-sighted. It results in employee resignations at a substantial price tag to the Agency and ultimately to the public.

*Angela Digeronimo, AFGE C220 New York Regional Vice President, AFGE Local 2369 President*

We appreciate your time and the consideration of these vitally important requests and look forward to working together to improve and enhance the Social Security Administration on behalf of both taxpayers and our hard-working employees.

AFGE Council 220