



2023 AFGE SSA General Committee Summer Legislative Conference

Social Security State of Emergency: An Agency in Crisis

The goal of the Biden Administration, along with Congress, Unions, community partners and the American people should be to foster an efficient and successful Social Security Administration.

Over the last decade, the number of Social Security beneficiaries have increased by 25% while budgets have been slashed by 17% with inflation. As a result, SSA employees do not have the resources they need to administer anti-poverty benefits to 73 million Americans. With caseloads growing rapidly, employees are experiencing fatigue and growing weary of the negative health side effects of burn out. Consequently, the SSA finds themselves in the middle of a staffing and attrition crisis.

In the words of Acting Commissioner Kilolo Kijakazi:

“Simply put, our hiring over the past decade has been limited due to our constrained budgets. At the same time, we gained 8 million new beneficiaries. Even before the pandemic, staff left due to retirement and job changes, and some staff who felt overworked began leaving. Then during the pandemic, we experienced the effects of the Great Resignation that occurred in the larger economy. Last year, we hit our lowest level of employees in 25 years, down to only about 56,000.”

According to The Partnership for Public Service and its’ poll “*The Best Places to Work for large Federal Agencies*,” the SSA went from second place in 2010 to ranking last (17 out of 17) in 2023. The SSA is in critical condition; according to an AFGE member survey conducted in March 2023, 53% of participants say they are considering leaving the agency within the next year.

To make a dire situation worse, it can be assumed that the new debt ceiling bill signed by President Biden on June 3rd, restricts SSA funding for FY 24 to FY 23 levels and limits FY 25 spending to a 1% increase from FY 23. According to the SSA, this, “would dramatically undermine our ability to serve the public.” If funding decreases continue, SSA may need to:

- Institute a hiring freeze.
- Furlough staff for weeks with the possibility of layoffs – which would result in an increase in wait times than customers experience today.
- Reduce the availability in our local offices – cutting off vital access to face-to-face service delivery.

- Decrease IT services at a time when we need it to help mitigate other cuts such as: office hour reductions, a hiring freeze, and layoffs.

For over a decade Congress has let SSA employees starve for the resources and staffing levels they need to deal with the ever-growing public demand for services.

As a result, the American public is not receiving vital services timely:

- It now takes over 7 months to get an initial decision on a disability claim.
- Currently, there are over 1 million initial disability cases pending; and
- 4.2 million items backlogged at the Payment Centers.

The time is NOW to address the SSAs underfunding crisis which would allow Federal employees to make the SSA work for the American people again.

AFGE is asking Congress to consider the following:

- ✓ Fund SSA at \$17.4 billion
- ✓ Pass legislation that will ensure SSAs administrative costs, which come from the trust funds and not general revenue, are not subject to appropriation's spending caps.
- ✓ Support an 8.7% pay increase for Federal workers.
- ✓ Direct the SSA to work collaboratively with the union.

The time is NOW for Congress to pass meaningful legislation that will make working conditions better for SSA employees, and in turn, the American people that rely on its vital services.

AFGE General Committee

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