

October 26, 2007

The Honorable David R. Obey
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable James T. Walsh
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Walsh,

The undersigned organizations represent many of the stakeholders of the Social Security Administration (SSA). We respectfully request that during conference negotiations on the FY 2008 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill that you accept the Senate recommended level for SSA administrative funding of \$9.872 billion which represents a \$275 million increase over the President's Request.

The additional funding is absolutely critical for SSA to address an increasing number of service delivery issues. Since the beginning of this decade, the number of pending Social Security Hearing has risen from 311,000 to an all time high of 753,000. In addition, approximately 84,000 of these Hearings are for veterans. The average time to receive a Hearing decision has increased from about 275 days at the beginning of this decade to 512 days in Fiscal Year 2007. As a result, many people are losing their homes, going without medical help, and dying without ever receiving a decision.

Not only has there been a marked degradation in the level of service that SSA provides related to the disability process, visitors to local SSA Field Offices are also being negatively impacted. Field Offices are seeing an ever-increasing number of visitors per week, with the current number of visitors averaging about 850,000 per week. In many Field Offices, these visitors are experiencing waiting times that are in excess of 2 hours. For those who try to reach their local SSA office by telephone, busy rates are running over 50%, due in large part to the fact that Field Offices are receiving over 60 million business-related phone calls each year.

In addition, SSA continues to be given responsibility for new workloads such as providing assistance with Part D Medicare cases and increasingly complex security checks and stewardship reviews for Social Security Number issuance, SSI redeterminations and medical Continuing Disability Reviews.

And, with the recent filing for Social Security benefits by the first baby boomer, SSA will be facing its most daunting challenge ever – the number of workers receiving Social Security retirement benefits will increase by 13 million over the next 10 years. These

citizens will be contacting SSA at a time when the agency is closing an increasing number of its Field Offices because it does not have the funding necessary to keep the offices adequately staffed and the doors open. With the massive number of baby boomers anticipated to need assistance and services from SSA in the years to come, it is imperative that the agency receives additional resources.

SSA is facing these many workload challenges while at its lowest staffing levels since 1972, which was before the SSI program started. The state Disability Determination Services have lost 850 employees in the last two years. If additional resources are not provided for the agency, staffing levels will continue to decline and service levels will continue to degrade.

For all of these reasons, we urge you to accept the increased funding level recommended by the Senate. We are confident that this increased investment in SSA will benefit our entire nation. On behalf of our many members throughout the United States we appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

AARP

Federal Managers Association

Alliance for Retired Americans

Goodwill Industries International

American Federation of Government
Employees

National Alliance on Mental Illness

American Federation of Teachers Program
on Retirement and Retirees

National Association of Disability
Examiners

American Postal Workers Union Retirees

National Association of Disability
Representative

Association of Administrative Law Judges

National Association of Professional
Geriatric Care Managers

Association of University Centers on
Disabilities (AUCD)

National Council of Social Security
Management Associations

National Council of Disability
Determination Directors

OWL - The Voice of Midlife and Older
Women

National Disability Rights Network

Social Security Disability Coalition

National Organization of Social Security
Claimants' Representatives

United Spinal Association

National Treasury Employees Union

Voice of the Retarded