

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 29, 2022

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

Thank you for your leadership in providing a critical funding increase for the Social Security Administration (SSA) under the *Continuing Appropriations and Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023*. The continuing resolution will allow SSA to maintain current levels of customer service through December 16. However, additional funds will be needed for the rest of the year: as President Biden has indicated, SSA needs a total increase of \$800 million for fiscal year 2023 just to maintain services, and significantly more to make much-needed improvements. As you work to complete the fiscal year 2023 appropriations process, we urge you to support the highest amount possible for SSA's operating budget, to improve customer service and reduce excessive, harmful delays for Americans trying to access their benefits.

Social Security is one of our nation's most beloved programs. It provides the foundation for retirement and protects families against financial devastation in the event of a worker's disability or death. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) serves some of the most vulnerable individuals, helping them to put food on the table, keep a roof over their heads, and pay for other basics. Together, Social Security and SSI form a cornerstone of economic security that is particularly important for people of color, women, people with disabilities, seniors, and children. It is impossible to overstate the importance of these SSA programs to the American people.

Unfortunately, SSA's administrative funding has not kept pace with the public's need for Social Security and SSI benefits. Since 2010, SSA's operating budget has declined by approximately 14 percent, after adjusting for inflation. The number of trained employees available to answer calls, take and process applications, and resolve problems is now at its lowest level in 25 years. At the

same time, since 2010, the number of Social Security and SSI beneficiaries has increased by approximately 20 percent. And amidst this constrained resource environment, SSA was forced to meet the unprecedented challenge of delivering service during the COVID-19 pandemic.


Today, this perfect storm of rising need and inadequate staffing and resources has led to growing backlogs, lengthy delays, and significant hardship for our constituents who are seeking to access SSA benefits and services. For example, only about one-third of callers to SSA's national toll-free hotline reach an agent – and callers wait on hold more than 30 minutes, on average. In addition, people who need to schedule an appointment to apply for benefits are often waiting significantly longer than in the past. For instance, in 2020 the average wait for a telephone appointment at an SSA field office was 17 calendar days, but at the start of 2022 the average wait had risen to 28 calendar days – a 65 percent increase.

Of particular concern, people applying for SSA benefits are facing devastating new delays and backlogs. At the end of 2021 more than 1.4 million benefit applications were sitting in a queue at an SSA field office, awaiting processing – a 23 percent increase from the end of 2019. The impact on people applying for disability benefits has been especially dire. Since 2008, thousands have died annually while awaiting a final decision on their disability benefit application, while many more have endured years without income, often exhausting their life savings and even losing their homes. Today, people are waiting nearly twice as long as they have in the past for an initial decision on their disability benefit application: 6.5 months, on average, compared to about 3.5 months, historically. Those who are denied and appeal wait another 6.5 months on average for a decision on their reconsideration appeal – also nearly twice as long as in the past. In fiscal year 2022 these delays affected more than 2 million people applying for disability benefits.


As our nation seeks to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, Social Security is one thing the American people should be able to count on. Yet without adequate overall funding, SSA waiting times, benefit delays, and service problems will only grow worse – something that none of our constituents want. These problems can only be resolved by providing increased funding for SSA. For example, dedicated funding provided by Congress in recent years helped SSA reduce delays in disability benefit appeals: average waiting times for hearings have gone from over 600 days in fiscal year 2017 to approximately 330 days in fiscal year 2022.

Social Security and SSI are essential to Americans, helping seniors, people with disabilities, survivors and their families to live with dignity and pay for food, housing, transportation, heating and cooling, out-of-pocket medical bills, and other basics. We urge you to support the highest amount possible for SSA's operating budget in fiscal year 2023, so Americans can receive the benefits they are counting on.


Sincerely,



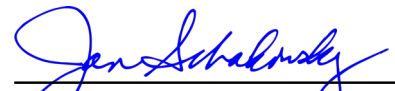
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Member of Congress



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Susan Wild
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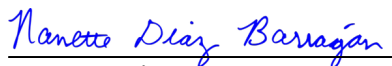
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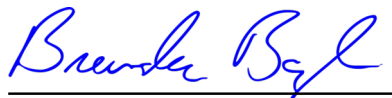
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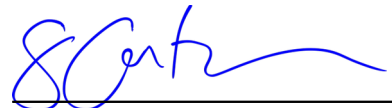
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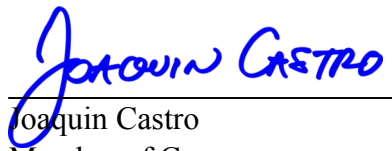
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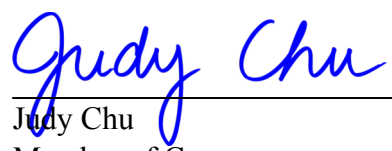
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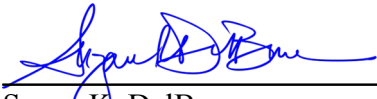
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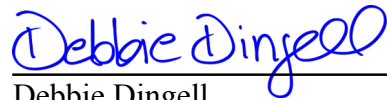
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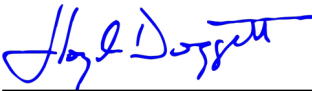
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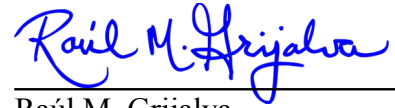
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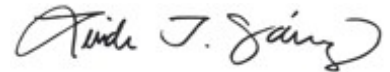
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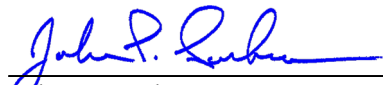
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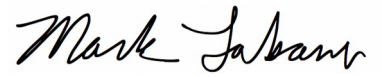
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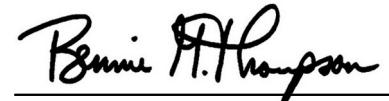
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