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U.S. House of Representatives

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June 27, 2019

The Honorable Andrew M. Saul
Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21207

Dear Commissioner Saul,

Please accept my congratulations on being sworn in as Commissioner of Social Security and my best wishes as you begin this important work.

As Chairman of the Social Security Subcommittee of the House Committee on Ways and Means, I look forward to meeting you in the coming weeks. But as you begin your time in office, I would like to share with you some of my top priorities for strengthening services to the American public by the Social Security Administration (SSA).

SSA must ensure strong front-line customer service, including at field offices and teleservice centers. People interact with SSA throughout their lives and for many reasons: from getting a Social Security number for a new baby, to planning for retirement, to applying for disability or survivors' benefits, to replacing a lost or stolen Social Security card. High-quality customer service, including at local field offices, is essential to ensuring that people can get the information and assistance from SSA that they need and have paid for. I have been proud to support the leadership of the House Appropriations Committee to provide an additional \$300 million for SSA's operations in Fiscal Year 2020, and I look forward to discussing your plans to strengthen SSA's front-line service to the public.

SSA must reduce delays and ensure access to the benefits that workers have earned. SSA has made significant progress in reducing the number of people waiting for a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ). Congress provided \$290 million in dedicated funding for backlog reduction in Fiscal Years 2017 through 2019, and appropriations legislation recently passed by the House would provide an additional \$50 million in dedicated funding in Fiscal Year 2020. However, I remain very concerned about the pace of backlog reduction – particularly the long times that people wait for a hearing, which currently average about 17 months. In addition, as outlined in prior letters to SSA, I oppose any changes to SSA's policies and rules that would deprive disability applicants of their due process rights or create harmful hurdles to their earned benefits.

SSA must strengthen the quality and accuracy of initial and reconsideration disability determinations, to prevent the need for eligible people to appeal to an ALJ. I am deeply disturbed that SSA is reinstituting the reconsideration level of appeal in 10 states, despite bipartisan and bicameral Congressional opposition, and without taking any steps to improve the ability of state Disability Determination Service agencies to make accurate decisions and avoid appeals.

SSA must resume mailing Social Security Statements as required by law. In 1989, Congress enacted legislation that required SSA to mail annual *Statements* to all individuals age 25 and older who are not receiving Social Security benefits, beginning in fiscal year 2000. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan eloquently expressed the rationale for this mandate: "All of us pay into Social Security but rarely, until we become beneficiaries, do we ever hear from Social Security...every month, in every paycheck, we see money withheld for Social Security, but we hear nary a word from the Social Security Administration... Let us take this simple step to reassure Americans that Social Security will be there for them" (101 Cong. Rec. S620, 1989). SSA should resume mailing *Statements* as required by law to inform Americans about their Social Security benefits, help people plan for their retirement, and allow workers to review and correct their earnings records.

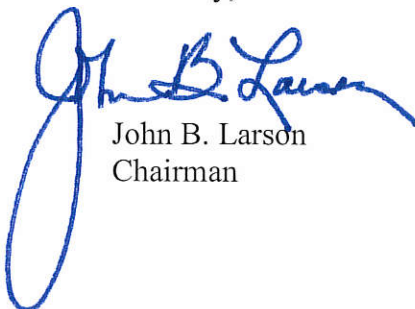
SSA must promote positive labor-management relations by upholding the rights of employees to bargain collectively and to have meaningful representation and assistance from their union. Employees are SSA's greatest asset. They make it possible for the agency to fulfill its mission and provide strong service and stewardship for the American people.

SSA must preserve the longstanding independence of Social Security's Chief Actuary and the actuarial staff, which has been upheld by all prior Commissioners. The actuaries' ability to provide non-partisan, unbiased, rigorous, and confidential expert analysis is essential to policymakers and the Board of Trustees. Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle rely on the neutrality and confidentiality of analysis provided by the Actuary.

Social Security is one of our nation's greatest achievements. Through it, nearly all workers earn retirement, disability, and survivor protections for themselves and their families. I hope you will agree with me that SSA's success lies in its ability to provide the American public with timely access to the Social Security benefits they have earned, through high-quality customer service and strong service delivery.

I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my service delivery priorities, outlined above, as well as my legislative priorities including the *Social Security 2100 Act*, my bill to improve Social Security benefits and ensure sustainable solvency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John B. Larson". The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

John B. Larson
Chairman