

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 19, 2024

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As the start of Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 approaches, we urge you to ensure the Social Security Administration (SSA) has at least \$15.4 billion for its operating budget, as President Biden has requested. Whether this is provided through an anomaly in a Continuing Resolution, or a funding level set through a full-year appropriations bill, SSA urgently needs this funding to address its customer service crisis. The funds are required for SSA to improve service and reduce excessive delays faced every day by Americans who are trying to access their Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.

SSA delivers essential income to more than 70 million seniors, people with disabilities, and children. Monthly Social Security and SSI payments help beneficiaries and their families to put food on the table, keep a roof over their heads, pay medical bills, and secure other basics. Social Security and SSI benefits are particularly important for people of color and women, who on average have fewer resources to fall back on in retirement or in the event of a sudden and severe disability, and for children. It is impossible to overstate the importance of these SSA programs to the American people – or the dire consequences if people are unable to access their benefits due to customer service delays.

Despite strong public support for Social Security, years of underfunding during a time of rising need have generated a customer service crisis at SSA. Since 2010, the number of Social Security beneficiaries has increased by nearly 25 percent as the baby boom generation ages. Yet SSA's administrative funding for basic operations has fallen by approximately 19 percent, after accounting for inflation. As a result, in 2022 SSA's staffing reached a 25-year low.

The funding shortfall means that people seeking to access SSA benefits and services often encounter major delays and other challenges. Last year, people calling SSA's national 1-800 number routinely waited on hold for an hour or more, and people scheduling a call or visit with a field office to get help with an application for benefits often waited more than a month until their appointment. Today, over 1 million people are in a queue awaiting an initial decision on their application for disability benefits, and it will take SSA nearly 8 months, on average, to make a decision – twice as long as in the past. These long waits can mean people of color, low-income applicants, and others who on average are less likely to have savings or other resources to fall back on can't afford even basic necessities. Thousands have died each year while waiting for a decision on whether they are eligible for disability benefits, and many more have endured years without income, in the process often exhausting their life savings and even losing their homes.

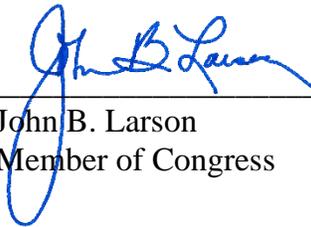
Under Commissioner Martin O'Malley's leadership, SSA has done all it can to reduce waits without adequate funding; for example, callers to the 1-800 number waited an average of 21 minutes in August, down from approximately 40 minutes at the start of the fiscal year. But in many cases, delays remain intolerably high and will inevitably skyrocket, with devastating consequences, if SSA does not receive enough funding in FY 2025. As outlined by the Commissioner, without adequate funding, disability applicants would face an average wait of 9 months for an initial decision by the end of the year, and seniors applying for retirement and Medicare would wait longer for their benefits to be approved. Already, nearly one in five seniors do not receive a timely decision on their retirement or Medicare application. In addition, SSA would likely be forced to reduce the hours field offices are open to the public and close field offices over time, extending wait times for seniors and people with disabilities.

We are pleased that appropriators recognized the gravity of SSA's customer service crisis and provided a modest boost over FY 2023 levels in the FY 2024 appropriation. However, SSA remains significantly underwater. A multi-year effort and sustained funding increases will be needed for SSA to restore service to acceptable levels. SSA has a proven track record of producing results when consistently given the resources needed to do the job. For

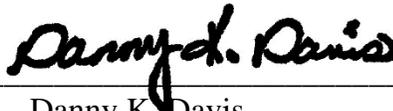
example, dedicated funding provided by Congress for several consecutive years has helped SSA reduce delays in disability benefit hearing appeals.

Social Security is essential to American families. We urge you to ensure that any continuing resolution or full-year appropriations bill addresses SSA's customer service crisis so Americans can receive the benefits they are counting on, by providing at least \$15.4 billion for SSA's administrative budget in FY 2025.

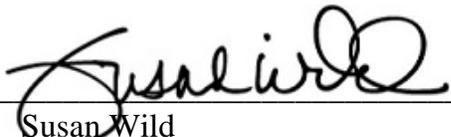
Sincerely,



John B. Larson
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



Susan Wild
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress