



For Immediate Release
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Contact: Scott Mulhauser/Erin Shields (Baucus)
Jill Gerber (Grassley)
(202) 224-4515

**BAUCUS, GRASSLEY APPLAUD SENATE PASSAGE OF BILL
TO HELP SECURE REPRESENTATION FOR AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES
IN SOCIAL SECURITY CLAIMS**

*Bill will continue successful programs that provide incentives for qualified professionals
to represent claimants with disabilities*

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Ranking Member Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) applauded the Senate’s unanimous passage today of a bill to make permanent two successful demonstration programs that provide incentives for qualified professionals to represent Americans with disabilities in claims for Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. Representation helps ensure Americans with disabilities get the benefits to which they are entitled.

“Navigating the claims process alone can be daunting for Americans with disabilities, and access to professional representation is important to ensuring they receive the Social Security and SSI benefits they deserve. In the past, some representatives were reluctant to take certain claims because of difficulties in collecting their compensation. This bill eliminates those difficulties so more Americans with disabilities will be helped by professional representation,” Baucus said. **“Facilitating payments to representatives through the Social Security Administration has proven to increase access to qualified professionals for the Americans with disabilities who depend on them.”**

“This will help people get the professional representation they need,” Grassley said. **“It streamlines the payment process so qualified professionals will be more willing to serve the people who will benefit from their expertise.”**

In the past, attorneys could request to collect their fees directly from the Social Security Administration (SSA). But the direct payment was available only to attorneys, not to non-attorney representatives, and only for Social Security claims, not for SSI claims. This deterred some representatives from pursuing these cases and made it difficult for some claimants to access the qualified representation they needed.

The Social Security Protection Act of 2004 created two demonstration projects to expand eligibility for direct payments to qualified non-attorney representatives and SSI claims. To qualify as a professional representative, individuals must pass an exam written and administered by the Commissioner of Social Security, meet certain educational and professional liability insurance requirements and pass a criminal background check. Both programs have proven successful at increasing claimants’ access to qualified, professional representation.

The Social Security Disability Applicants' Access to Professional Representation Act passed today makes these two successful projects permanent, streamlining the compensation process and providing the certainty representatives need to pursue these cases.

The House approved the Social Security Disability Applicants' Access to Professional Representation Act of 2010, H.R. 4532, on Feb. 4, and it is now headed to the President's desk.

The Senate Committee on Finance holds jurisdiction over the U.S. Social Security program.

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