

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

March 8, 2018

Roy Blunt, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Patty Murray, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you finalize appropriations for FY2018, we request you provide the Social Security Administration (SSA) with an operating budget of at least \$13.042 billion. That level of funding would be \$560 million over SSA's FY2017 budget and double the Administration's request for additional funding after enactment of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. With this funding, SSA will be able to hire more judges and support staff to reduce the disability backlog, improve efficiency by modernizing information technology, and address other workloads where service has deteriorated.

Since 2011, the average wait time for a disability hearing rose from 426 days to over 600 days - a record high - with over 1.1 million Americans currently waiting. Our states have some of the longest hearing wait times in the nation. In Cincinnati, the wait time is 20.5 months. In Eugene, the wait time is 21 months. More must be done to reduce these wait times and the budget we have requested will allow SSA to make important progress. Other areas of service are also suffering. Roughly four million Americans are caught in the Program Service Centers' (PSCs) backlog, the offices responsible for processing and adjusting already-approved benefits. These delays place an avoidable hardship on Americans waiting for benefits.

When provided adequate funding, SSA can reduce the backlogs and improve wait times. In 2008, SSA faced about 750,000 Americans waiting for a disability hearing with an average wait time of over 500 days. Congress provided SSA with an additional \$500 million to combat the hearings backlog. By 2012, the hearings pending were dramatically reduced and average processing time fell to almost 350 days.

Americans pay into Social Security out of every paycheck. When Americans need Social Security, they should not have to wait for months - or even years - to receive the benefits they have earned. We thank you for your consideration of our request and look forward to working with you to ensure that SSA is able to provide the quality service all Americans deserve.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Finance



Sherrod Brown  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Social Security, Pensions, and  
Family Policy  
Committee on Finance