

Gail S. Ennis
Inspector General Nominee, Social Security Administration
Committee on Finance
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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Wyden and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I want to thank the President for nominating me for the position of Inspector General for the Social Security Administration. I am honored to appear before this Committee as you consider my nomination.

My sister travelled from Connecticut to be here today and I have friends in attendance. My parents and other sister were unable to make the trip from Connecticut but I am sure they are watching.

I am especially passionate about protecting Social Security benefits for those persons in need. For the last several years, I cared for my husband as his health declined from the effects of dementia. I was thankful that I had the financial means to provide for his care but came to understand the enormous financial burden on families caring for sick relatives. A Social Security check may be the only financial relief many of these families receive and may make the difference in their lives and the lives of the people for whom they are caring. I am aware that individuals wait sometimes for years to receive a disability determination, which is unacceptable; I think we can do better.

I am cognizant of the many challenges facing the Social Security Administration, including disability hearings backlogs, payment accuracy, an aging IT infrastructure, issues with the disability case processing system, data security, improving customer service, and combatting fraud. Should I be confirmed as the Inspector General for the Social Security Administration, I will work with Congress and the agency to address these and other challenges, to reduce waste, fraud and abuse, and to continue to improve SSA's effectiveness and efficiency.

I am also keenly aware that an Inspector General must be, and must be perceived to be, independent of agency management. A strong, ethical, and independent IG performs an invaluable oversight role for the Congress and for the people of the United States.

My professional career has focused on government and independent investigations, including cases related to allegations of accounting fraud and violations of government regulations. I have counseled companies, audit committees, and boards about corporate governance issues, public disclosures, and improving processes and procedures, and internal controls. Many of my representations have involved large teams of lawyers, forensic accountants, IT and discovery professionals, and support staff. This experience demonstrates that I have the legal, financial, investigative, and management skills to serve as an effective Inspector General of the Social Security Administration.

Social Security pays almost one trillion dollars in benefits annually to seniors, widows and widowers, children who have lost a parent, and people with disabilities. Supplemental Security Income pays benefits to elderly, blind, or disabled people with limited income. These programs touch the lives of around 70 million people each year and will touch the lives of most Americans at some point. For millions of beneficiaries, a Social Security check is a vital safety net, allowing them basic necessities: a roof over their heads and food on their tables.

Should I be confirmed as the Inspector General for the Social Security Administration, I will work diligently to provide oversight for the efficient management of the agency and to detect and act on waste, fraud, and abuse so that only those who qualify receive benefits and they receive them on time and without error. It is imperative to protect these valuable tax payer dollars so that the American public continues to trust and count on this safety net.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you.