

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

October 19, 2017

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

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

Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

We write to urge you to provide no less than the President's request of \$12.5 billion for the Social Security Administration's (SSA) administrative budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 in any final appropriations bill. We are concerned that the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies (LHHS) appropriations bill recently reported by the full Appropriations committee reduces SSA's administrative budget by almost \$460 million. At a time when the agency is facing an unprecedented number of our constituents waiting for a hearing and recent press articles have headlines stating that "thousands die on waitlists," SSA cannot make significant progress at reducing the disability hearings backlog without adequate resources.

Recent strain on SSA's operating budget has caused significant declines in service delivery. The enclosed AP article from September 18 reports that between FY2010 and FY2017, SSA's operating budget has been essentially flat, while at the same time, an additional 6 million people began receiving retirement or disability benefits. Over that same period, the average wait time for an appeals hearing rose from 426 days to roughly 600 days -- a record high -- with over 1.1 million Americans currently waiting for a hearing.

SSA has a plan to improve the agency's operations and reduce the hearings backlog, called the Compassionate And REsponsive Service (CARES) plan. The CARES plan will modernize informational technology systems, improve business processes, and -- importantly -- hire more administrative law judges and the necessary support staff. Without adequate and sustained administrative resources, SSA will be unable to implement these improvements and wait times will continue to grow.

We appreciate your ability to report a bipartisan bill and take seriously the statements both of you made at the markup indicating the funding level for SSA in the bill is inadequate. We would appreciate a response from you that an amount no less than the President's request for SSA's

administrative budget will be a high priority as the final appropriations bill for FY2018 is developed.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Finance



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