

Crapo Statement at Hearing on Social Security Operations During the Pandemic
April 29, 2021

Washington, D.C.--U.S. Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, delivered the following remarks at a hearing entitled, "Social Security During COVID: How the Pandemic Hampered Access to Benefits and Strategies for Improving Service Delivery."

The text of Ranking Member Crapo's remarks, as prepared, is below.

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing on Social Security service delivery during the pandemic.

"Social Security employees were informed in March of last year that they would be teleworking indefinitely and that field offices would be closed to the public because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Within days of announcing a shutdown, the majority of field office employees and a large number of teleservice center employees were teleworking.

"Initial challenges included lack of equipment, software licensing, and data capacity. The leadership, management and the workforce at the Social Security Administration—or SSA—responded rapidly to increase data capacity and stabilize networks after only a few weeks.

"During the pandemic, conducting office and processing-center work in-person was not possible because of lockdowns and worker-safety concerns. With those constraints, SSA has had to innovate, relax some procedural rules and perform in many previously untested ways.

"Thus far, the agency has performed admirably and rapidly to ensure that beneficiaries, including at-risk populations, obtain the services they need.

"I have been impressed by the dedication and diligence of SSA's workforce, field office and processing center managers, and leadership, all the way to the top.

"Customer service and service delivery have been at the forefront of their efforts during the pandemic.

"We are fortunate to have SSA's head of operations, Ms. Grace Kim, with us today. I am interested in her assessment of where SSA has been during the pandemic, where things stand currently and lessons learned thus far to help inform the future.

"From the beginning of the pandemic, field office management staff have continued to physically go into offices to handle incoming and outgoing mail, scan documents to

support those working from home, provide in-person service for critical need cases and handle facility-related duties.

“Ms. Peggy Murphy is also with us today, and I look forward to hearing about her experiences and insights as a representative of field office management.

“I am also interested in the experiences and service-delivery perspectives of our other two witnesses, Ms. McGuinness and Mr. Causeya.

“During the pandemic, it has been important to focus on at-risk populations, including many on Supplemental Security Income, Disability Insurance beneficiaries and homeless beneficiaries.

“I am interested in hearing today about service delivery to at-risk beneficiaries and outreach. My understanding is that the Social Security Administration has engaged in an unprecedented amount of outreach to community organizations, beneficiary-advocate organizations and directly to at-risk beneficiaries themselves.

“I commend the Social Security Administration’s commitment and dedication to ensure that beneficiaries receive service and benefits.

“Commissioner Saul has stayed true to the focus on beneficiary service that we all expected when he was confirmed, on a bipartisan basis, by this Committee and the full Senate.

“Solid leadership and a dedicated workforce have been key to enabling the Agency to confront the service-delivery shock of the pandemic. Thus far, SSA has risen to the challenge.

“Thank you Mr. Chairman.”

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