

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

February 28, 2018

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education, and Related
Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education, and Related
Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you consider an appropriations measure to fund the government for the remainder of FY 2018, we urge you to include additional funding for the basic operations of the Social Security Administration (SSA) in response to widespread concerns from Americans about delayed service delivery and long wait times.

We urge you to provide SSA with at least an additional \$560 million over the total FY 2017 SSA Limitation on Administrative Expenses level of \$12.482 billion, and to put the additional funds into SSA's basic operating budget. This amount is double the Trump Administration's request for additional funding for SSA as a result of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. Moreover, it would put these funds where they are needed most and allow SSA to start reducing wait times across the board, so our constituents can receive the benefits they have earned on time, and problems can be resolved quickly.

SSA needs sufficient resources to perform its basic work of paying benefits, approving benefit applications, and responding to inquiries from the public. And yet, SSA has significantly less funding today than it has had in the past. Between FY 2010 and FY 2017, SSA's base operating budget has shrunk by 11 percent after adjusting for inflation. At the same time, the number of Americans receiving Social Security has climbed by 8 million (15 percent) – and the aging of the Baby Boomers into retirement is going to continue for years to come.

A few examples highlight the harmful results of these funding cuts:

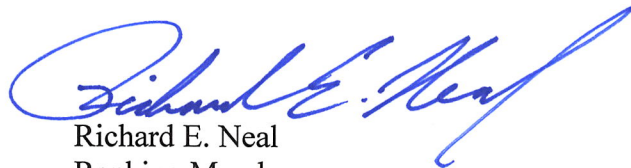
- Disability waiting times have skyrocketed to unprecedented levels, with disabled workers having to wait 605 days in FY 2017 for an appeals hearing. This is a direct consequence of inadequate funding for SSA's basic operational needs. This will not get better without

additional funds for SSA to hire the Administrative Law Judges (ALJs), attorneys, and clerks it needs to process the number of appeals it receives.

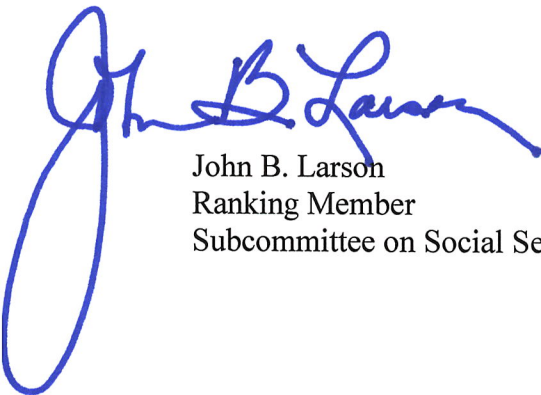
- Americans who call Social Security's national 800-number to resolve a problem or find out information aren't even able to get through. The majority of callers give up without getting through – they either get a busy signal, or hang up after lengthy waits. This year, SSA projects that those who do get through will have to wait 20 minutes on hold before connecting, on average.
- Approximately 4 million Americans are caught in the “hidden backlog” at SSA's payment centers, which handle more complex situations. Beneficiaries who are trapped in this backlog include individuals awaiting past-due disability benefits that are owed to them, an update in their Medicare enrollment, survivor benefits, corrections in their check amount, and adjustments due to being underpaid or overpaid.

There is no excuse to underfund Social Security. Workers pay for Social Security through their payroll contributions, and these contributions can only be used for benefits and the cost of operating the program. For millions of retirees, widows and widowers, severely ill or injured workers, and children, Social Security provides the foundation of economic security. We appreciate your attention to this request. We look forward to working with you to protect Social Security for all Americans.

Sincerely,



Richard E. Neal
Ranking Member



John B. Larson
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Social Security



Danny K. Davis
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Human Resources