

March 13, 2015

The Honorable Tom Price, M.D.  
Chairman  
Committee on the Budget  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Budget  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Enzi  
Chairman  
Committee on the Budget  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Budget  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Price and Enzi and Ranking Members Van Hollen and Sanders:

As organizations representing stakeholders of the Social Security Administration (SSA), we respectfully urge you to stop sequestration-level spending caps from taking effect in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 and place a high priority on restoring adequate administrative funding for SSA operations as you develop the FY 2016 Budget Resolution.

We are gravely concerned that the consequences of sequestration-level spending caps in FY 2016 would be devastating for SSA and the American people who depend on Social Security. In FY 2013 SSA sustained a \$386 million sequestration reduction, and it is imperative that SSA be spared this scenario in the future. If not averted, the impact of sequestration would once again be dire for members of the public who rely on SSA for essential services. SSA would likely face furloughs and a freeze in hiring. SSA would experience significant service disruptions and even longer delays for people who desperately need vital assistance.

These impacts would include increased waiting times in field offices; longer claims processing times, in particular at the hearing level; backlogs in important post-entitlement work; higher telephone busy rates and unanswered calls; additional delays in pending disability cases; and reduction in efforts to address cost-saving program integrity workloads such as medical continuing disability reviews (CDRs) and SSI redeterminations. SSA must have adequate administrative resources to preserve good service to the American public and to ensure the efficient, accurate, and expeditious administration of this vital social insurance program.

We urge you to give careful consideration to our nation's budget priorities and the needs of the American public. As you construct the FY 2016 Budget Resolution we urge you to do the following: stop budget sequestration in FY 2016 and beyond; and include specific language that provides the level of funding requested for SSA in the President's FY 2016 Budget Request.

SSA received modest increases in administrative resources in both FY 2014 and FY 2015. As a result of the FY 2014 funding the agency was able to begin replacing some of the 11,000 employees lost since FY 2010. The FY 2015 funding has ensured the agency, and in particular the field offices and teleservice centers, can deliver vital services to the American public while at the same time fulfilling SSA's stewardship responsibilities.

In addition, the increases have allowed SSA to restore some of the reduced public service hours. While this has allowed more public access it has reduced the time employees can spend working on backlogs. As has been communicated in the past, it will require additional staff to significantly reduce the backlogs and wait times plaguing SSA field offices.

The President's FY 2016 Budget Request for SSA's administrative expenses is \$12.513 billion. This level of funding will allow SSA to improve and modernize customer service, enhance program integrity efforts, deter and detect fraud and errors, and continue to address high volumes of work. One area where it is critical that SSA continues to make progress is in addressing the backlog of pending disability hearings, which have now reached an all-time high of over 1 million, and with an average processing time of more than 15 months. The President's Budget Request is \$707 million over last year's enacted funding level and would cover the \$355 million increase in SSA's fixed costs while still providing much-needed investments in the agency's staff and information technology. We respectfully request that the FY 2016 Budget Resolution include no less than the President's Budget Request for SSA's administrative expenses.

We also request that you give careful consideration to funding for program integrity workloads. Program integrity initiatives save taxpayer dollars and are fiscally prudent in reducing the federal budget and deficit. Funding for program integrity workloads such as Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs) and Supplemental Security Income redeterminations generate net projected savings to the federal budget. The Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA) allows increases above the federal government's annual spending caps through FY 2021 for program integrity purposes. Because the "cap adjustment" was fully funded for FY 2015, the base SSA program integrity funding (\$273 million) and the SSA cap adjustment (\$1.166 billion) are proposed to be funded through discretionary appropriations in FY 2016. With the President's Budget Request in FY 2016, SSA will be able to complete 908,000 CDRs and 2.622 million SSI redeterminations.

We also request that consideration be given to repealing the discretionary cap adjustments and replacing them with mandatory funding for SSA starting in FY 2017. This would allow SSA to conduct enough CDRs and SSI redeterminations to eliminate the backlog by FY 2019. Thus, if the BCA cap adjustment is revised it would be possible for SSA to achieve even greater savings for the federal budget.

Great care must be taken to balance program integrity initiatives and service levels at the field offices, teleservice centers, program service centers, disability determination services, and hearings offices. The same SSA field office and disability determination services employees who answer telephone calls, take initial claim applications, and develop and adjudicate benefit claims, also process program integrity workloads.

The FY 2016 Budget Resolution provides an important opportunity to guide our nation's budget priorities. We are confident adequate and sustained resources for SSA operations will benefit the entire nation. On behalf of the undersigned organizations, with members throughout the United States, we sincerely appreciate your consideration of this request.

AFL-CIO

AFSCME

Alliance for Retired Americans

The Arc of the United States

Association of Administrative Law Judges

B'nai B'rith International

Easter Seals

Corporation for Supportive Housing

Federal Bar Association Social Security Law Section

Federal Managers Association

Lupus Foundation of America

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

n4a (National Association of Area Agencies on Aging)

National Association of Disability Examiners (NADE)

National Association of Disability Representatives

National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers

National Association of State Head Injury Administrators

National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare (NCPSSM)

National Council of Disability Determination Directors (NCDDD)

National Council of Social Security Administration Field Operations Locals, AFGE

National Council of Social Security Management Associations (NCSSMA)

National Multiple Sclerosis Society

National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives

National Respite Coalition

National Treasury Employees Union

OWL-The Voice of Women 40+

Paralyzed Veterans of America

Social Security Disability Coalition

VOR, Speaking out for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.