

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 27, 2022

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

We urge you to support the highest amount possible, no less than President Biden's request of \$14.8 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 for the Social Security Administration (SSA) operating budget, so that the agency can strengthen services and reduce excessive delays faced every day by Americans who are trying to access their earned benefits.

Social Security is a cornerstone of our nation's economic security. As we continue to face the national disaster of the COVID-19 pandemic, Social Security's role is more important than ever. Almost all workers are contributing to Social Security and earning its benefits, and nearly 1 in 3 households include at least one person who receives Social Security. The income Social Security provides is vital for retirees, families who have lost a breadwinner, and workers who have experienced a career-ending injury or illness. It is impossible to overstate the importance of the program to its 65 million beneficiaries: for many retirees, Social Security provides most or all of their income.

Despite the importance of Social Security and its strong level of public support, SSA's administrative funding for basic operations fell by more than 14 percent from 2010 to 2022, after accounting for inflation. Yet over the same time span, the number of beneficiaries increased by more than 21 percent as the baby boom generation aged. Unfortunately, in the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, funding constraints forced SSA to close offices and reduce staffing, leading to lengthy delays during a time of rising need. From 2010 to 2021, SSA's workforce was reduced by approximately 8,500 full-time, permanent workers or 1 in 8 employees – including a loss of nearly 1,500 from 2019 to 2021, alone. In recent years, the majority of callers to SSA's 1-800 number could not get through because of busy signals and long hold times. And thousands have died annually while waiting for a decision on whether they are eligible for disability benefits, while many more have endured years without income, in the process often exhausting their life savings and even losing their homes.

COVID-19 severely exacerbated these customer service challenges. SSA has remained open for business, but for the first two years of the pandemic its offices were closed to most in-person visitors. The pandemic disrupted SSA's operations, generating significant new delays in services ranging from replacing lost or stolen Social Security cards to processing new benefit claims. For example, the number of disability benefit applications that are in a queue awaiting an initial decision has gone up by 35 percent since the end of 2019, and waits for initial decisions have

nearly doubled from the historical average of about 3.5 months to nearly 6 months, today. The pandemic's effects on SSA's ability to deliver timely and accessible services have been pervasive, and particularly harmful for people of color, low-income seniors, people with disabilities, and others who are struggling and in urgent need of SSA services and benefits. SSA field offices reopened on April 7, 2022 and the agency now faces a potential flood of service requests as individuals are finally able to visit for in-person assistance.

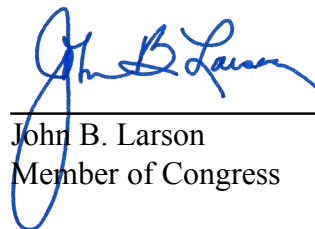
As our nation seeks to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, Social Security is one thing the American people should be able to count on. Yet without adequate overall funding, SSA waiting times, benefit delays, and service problems will only grow worse – something that none of our constituents want. These problems can only be resolved by providing increased funding for SSA. For example, dedicated funding provided by Congress in recent years has helped SSA reduce delays in disability benefit appeals: average waiting times for hearings have gone from over 600 days in FY 2017 to approximately 325 days in FY 2021.

Social Security is essential to American families. We urge you to support the highest amount possible, no less than President Biden's funding request for SSA in FY 2023, so Americans can receive the benefits they are counting on.

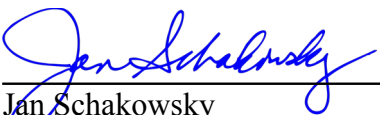
Sincerely,



Susan Wild
Member of Congress



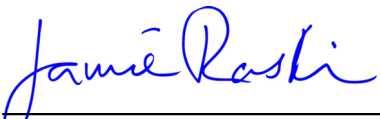
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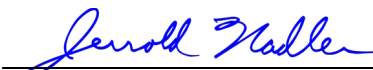
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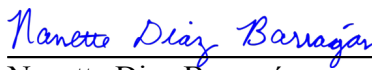
Ferrol Nadler
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Nanette Diaz Barragan
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Gwen S. Moore
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Dina Titus
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Donald M. Payne, Jr.
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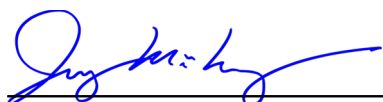
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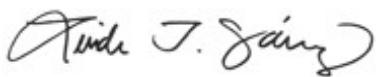
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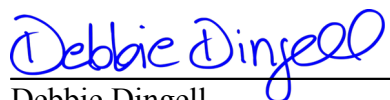
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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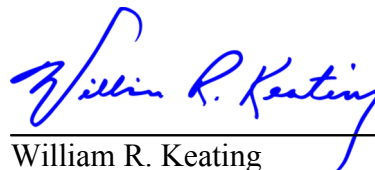
Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



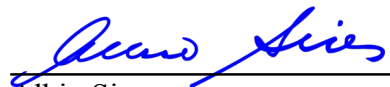
Dwight Evans
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Diana DeGette
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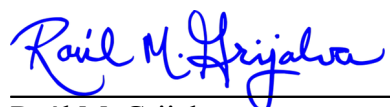
William R. Keating
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Albio Sires
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Nikema Williams
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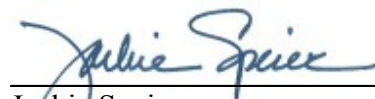
Raúl M. Grijalva
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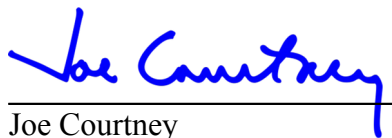
Rick Larsen
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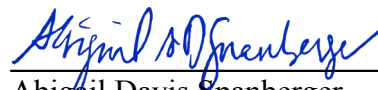
Daniel T. Kildee
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Jackie Speier
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Joe Courtney
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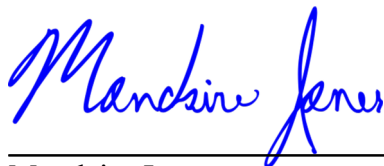
Abigail Davis Spanberger
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David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



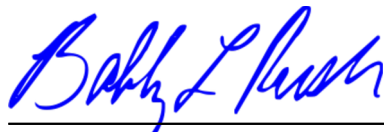
Conor Lamb
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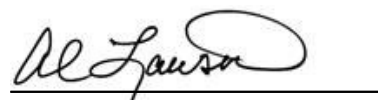
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Elissa Slotkin
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Maxine Waters
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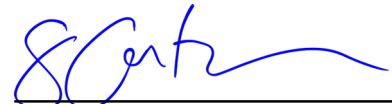
Tom O'Halleran
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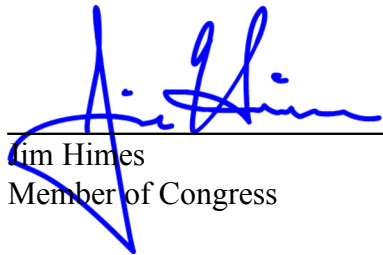
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Jesús G. "Chuy" García
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Sean Casten
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Jason Crow
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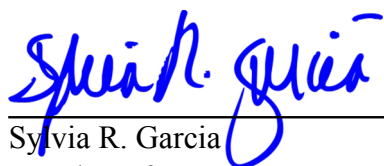
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Seth Moulton
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Ted Deutch
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Sylvia R. Garcia
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Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress