

STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SECURITY

...don't cut it.

March 1, 2017

United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

The Strengthen Social Security Coalition is a broadly-diverse coalition comprised of over 350 national and state organizations representing seniors, working families, people with disabilities, women, people of color, veterans, low-income Americans, and many others – together totaling more than 50 million Americans. **The Coalition strongly urges you to join Representative Al Lawson and Representative Darren Soto and sign the congressional letter urging the Trump Administration to exempt the Social Security Administration (SSA) from the federal government's hiring and promotion freeze.**

As you know, our Social Security system provides modest but essential economic support when wages are lost as the result of death, serious and permanent disability, or old age. Americans earn these benefits through their work and Social Security contributions. By law, those contributions must be used for Social Security. More than 99 cents of every dollar of Social Security's dedicated revenue pays for those benefits; less than one cent of each dollar goes to the salaries of SSA employees and the other costs associated with the payment of those programs.

Because Social Security has no borrowing authority, none of the cost of the salaries adds to the federal deficit or debt. Indeed, Social Security currently has a \$2.8 trillion surplus and is projected by SSA to have a surplus of \$31.1 billion in 2017 alone. To repeat, not only are these services critically important, but unlike other government services, the American people have already pre-paid them.

Despite the fact that Americans have already funded the cost of the salaries of those responsible for administering Social Security and despite its growing and important work load, SSA has, in recent years, been drastically limited by Congress in how much of its surplus it can spend for administration. Even while the number of Americans receiving Social Security has increased by 13 percent over the past 6 years, SSA's budget has actually shrunk by 10 percent, after inflation.

At the same time, more and more of SSA's budget has been dedicated by Congress to targeting waste, fraud, and abuse rather than going towards the in-person field services that the American people want and need. This, despite the fact that Social Security is much more efficient than its private sector counterparts and that the rare instances of fraud have generally been identified by the very work force that is now under a hiring and promotion freeze.

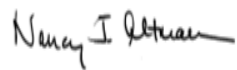
The inadequate funding has caused limited hours at, and even closures of, field offices, as well as severe and growing backlogs for those claiming the benefits they have earned. Since 2011, 64 field offices have been closed, and Social Security's network of mobile contact offices serving rural areas have been essentially eliminated.

The hiring freeze, exacerbated by inadequate funding, will make the backlogs even longer and the ability to get the people's work done even harder. This has increased wait times for Americans seeking SSA's services. Not only are wait times at field offices and on the 1-800 number long and growing longer, SSA's disability appeals backlog has climbed to record high and unconscionable levels. Over 1.1 million people are waiting over 587 days, on average, for a hearing to determine their eligibility for Social Security disability benefits.

Across all political affiliations, Americans support and have a strong desire for the services provided by SSA. Services, to repeat, that they have paid for. More than any other agency, SSA is the face of the federal government.

For all these reasons, we urge you to sign the Lawson-Soto letter exempting SSA from the hiring and promotion freeze. This is an important step in assuring that Americans receive the first-class services they have earned. To sign the letter please contact Adam.LaRose@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Nancy J. Altman
Co-chair, Strengthen Social Security Coalition