



Disability Rights

WASHINGTON

Washington's protection and advocacy system

December 15, 2017

VIA EMAIL

Representative Sam Johnson
Chairman
Social Security Subcommittee
House Ways and Means Committee
2304 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

Representative John Larson
Ranking Member
Social Security Subcommittee
House Ways and Means Committee
1501 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

Dear Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member Larson:

On behalf of Disability Rights Washington, I write in strong support of H.R. 4547, the Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act of 2017. Enactment of this legislation will provide critical protections for Social Security beneficiaries as well as needed reforms to the crucial representative payee program.

Disability Rights Washington was created by four mothers who banded together to get the nation's first special education law passed in Washington State in 1971. We were selected by the governor to be the federally mandated protection and advocacy system in Washington State when the first Protection and Advocacy (P&A) system in 1977 through the passage of Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act. Over the fourth year history as the protection and advocacy system for Washington State, Disability Rights Washington's scope of advocacy has grown as congress has recognized that people with various disabilities need additional protection around a variety of issues.

News stories, Office of Inspector General and Government Accountability Office reports, and hearings held by the House Ways and Means Committee have demonstrated the need for changes in the representative payee program. Your bipartisan legislation proposes many important and needed changes that will streamline the program as well as take important steps to increase oversight of the representative payee program by funding the nationwide network of P&A systems to monitor how representative payees are administering the Social Security funds received by beneficiaries.

This partnership between the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the P&A systems will not only allow SSA to meet its responsibilities, but also allows the P&A systems to uncover and address health and safety issues and other matters important to the beneficiary that fall outside of SSA's purview. People with representative payees live in a variety of settings including psychiatric hospital, nursing home, adult family homes, assisted living facilities, and of course, their own homes. Disability Rights Washington has visited thousands of people in these settings in every corner of the state. We have provided thousands of people with information about how to resolve

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DRW is a member of the National Disability Rights Network. A substantial portion of the DRW budget is federally funded.

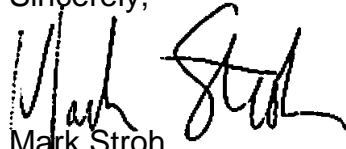
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problems with their representative payees and we have assisted individuals who needed our advocacy support to resolve problems. For example, one woman had an ex-husband who was still designated as her representative payee over her objection. She claimed he was stealing money. We assisted her by reviewing all of the accounting the ex-husband had and drafted a complaint filed with SSA about his actions. Last year we drafted a publication about challenging your representative payee and it is now our most popular publication with nearly 6,000 people accessing it last year. This publication was primarily disseminated online due to our lack of previously awarded representative payee contracts with SSA. Active, in-person monitoring that brings us into the residences of beneficiaries would allow us to get this information to more people who need the information even more than those who have already accessed it. That includes people who do not have the financial resources or computer literacy to find the information online and those isolated in settings where information is controlled by facility operators who may not prioritize access to this information or may have an actual conflict of interest due to a financial incentive in preventing people from understanding their rights.

Again, we greatly appreciate your work together on this important issue culminating in the introduction of this critical legislation. We stand ready to work with both of you to quickly get this important legislation enacted into law. Should you have any questions or need more information, please be in touch with David Carlson, at 206-324-1521, or davidc@dr-wa.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Stroh". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Mark Stroh
Executive Director