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February 18, 2022

Dr. Kilolo Kijakazi
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Dr. Kijakazi:

We write today to request information about the Social Security Administration's (SSA) plans to improve the quality of and access to the service it provides to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. While we are encouraged by the SSA's recently announced plans to begin expanding in-office services in April, we remain concerned over our constituents' ongoing difficulty accessing SSA's services.

Through the determination and hard work of SSA's dedicated staff and leadership, the SSA was able to quickly respond to the unprecedented management challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by transitioning from primarily delivering services in-person to almost exclusively delivering services by phone, by mail, and online.

However, in the almost two years since, the SSA has been unable to adapt these service channels to keep pace with the needs of the public. Additionally, despite some claims to the contrary, the SSA has seen an almost 15 percent decrease in field office productivity because of the time-consuming manual tasks required to convert non-portable in-office workloads to portable workloads. Since the SSA transitioned to maximum remote work and closed its offices to the general public, workloads have gone unprocessed, backlogs have grown, and wait times have increased.

We continue to hear from Americans who have experienced trouble accessing SSA's services. Some have been unable to schedule in-person appointments to resolve urgent matters, while others have been unable to access their online accounts. Many more have tried to contact the SSA by phone only to be disconnected after long waits, hung up on or disconnected, provided with incorrect information, or otherwise experienced poor service. Every month an average of more than six million calls made to SSA's field offices go unanswered and over the past year wait times for calls that make it through have more than doubled.

As a result of these difficulties, Americans have faced hardships such as missed or delayed benefits, lost or missing documents, improper payments, and even homelessness. The issues being raised are not new. Members of the public and Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have raised these and similar issues with the SSA since the early days of the pandemic.

To help the American public better understand how the SSA intends to resolve these issues and provide safe and accessible services going forward, please respond to the following by March 4, 2022:

- 1) What guidance should we provide to our constituents who are having difficulty accessing the SSA's services?
- 2) How is the SSA measuring and managing the quality of service it provides to the public?
- 3) As of the date of this letter:
 - a. What services are available for in-office appointments?
 - b. What services are only available by in-office service?
 - c. How can a member of the public request an appointment?
- 4) What are the SSA's plans to expand in-office services including milestones and timelines?
- 5) What services have been deferred, delayed, or reduced since March 2020?
- 6) What are the SSA's plans to expand remote services and improve on the public's ability to successfully access and use these services?
- 7) Please provide the monthly figures since March 2019 of the following for both field offices and teleservice centers:
 - a. Calls received;
 - b. Calls offered;
 - c. Calls handled;
 - d. Short calls; and,
 - e. Dropped or lost calls.
- 8) What are the SSA's plans to resume telework?
- 9) How will the SSA measure the impact of telework on service delivery?
- 10) How will the SSA ensure that enough employees are on-site to meet the public's demand for in-person services and to process non-portable workloads?

We look forward to receiving your response. Should you or your staff have any questions, please contact Shaun Freiman, the Chief Counsel for Social Security, at (202) 225-4021.

Sincerely,



Tom Reed
Republican Leader
Social Security Subcommittee



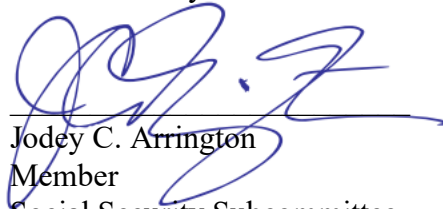
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