



September 15, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-221, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-230, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

AARP, on behalf of our 38 million members and all older Americans nationwide, again urges the Congress to provide the Social Security Administration (SSA) with the funding it needs to fulfill its vital mission in a timely and effective manner.

Over the past decade, the SSA has been plagued with serious customer service deficiencies occasioned by underfunding. As we noted in our May 15 and June 21 letters to the Appropriations Committee, AARP strongly urges the Congress to provide no less than Acting SSA Commissioner Kilolo Kijakazi's request for FY 2023, \$15.356 billion, including funding for the Office of the Inspector General, research and demonstrations.

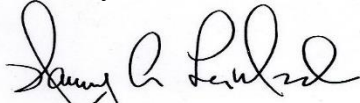
AARP has great concerns that SSA will be unable to maintain customer service at current levels, deficient as they are, without funding above the current funding level under a continuing resolution. Hence, we believe the Congress should provide an anomaly for SSA that is no less than the anomaly requested by the Administration, \$14.1 billion. AARP does appreciate that the Congress provided some additional funding for SSA for FY 2022, but that amount was \$847 million less than the President's FY 2022 Budget request and was far less than the amounts needed to cover uncontrollable increases in its fixed expenses. The Acting Commissioner correctly predicted on April 28, in the FY 2022 Operating Plan the Congress requested, that the \$13.341 billion in funding provided in the FY 2022 omnibus would result in "longer lines and wait times in our field offices, and growing backlogs as we work through increased claims."

The added burden occasioned by the pandemic did not help matters, but a steady erosion in SSA's administrative funding over the past decade is the primary reason for the rapid decline in customer service. Between 2010 and 2021, SSA's operating budget shrank by 14 percent even as the number of beneficiaries grew by 22 percent to more than 70 million Americans. The latest available SSA data shows that disability processing times have skyrocketed to an all-time high of 198 days – nearly three times longer than just a decade earlier. SSA also reports that callers to the national 1-800 number today are waiting about 31 minutes, or about ten times longer than callers waited in FY 2012. And, more importantly, the average disability claimant today will likely wait more than 2 years for a final hearing decision while their health worsens – tragically, more than 10,000 people die every year while waiting for a decision.

AARP does not believe that additional funding alone will enable the agency to restore service to an acceptable level. Hence, we sent a letter to Acting Commissioner Kijakazi on September 12 to express our dismay regarding recent reports of long lines in inclement weather at several field offices and to request greater detail regarding the agency's plans to address other customer service problems in local field offices, over the phone and online.

We greatly appreciate your attention to this issue. Social Security is a lifeline for millions of Americans who count on the agency to be there for them when they need it most. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Timothy Gearan on our Government Affairs staff at 202-434-3803.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy A. LeaMond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nancy" and last name "LeaMond" clearly distinguishable.

Nancy A. LeaMond  
Executive Vice President and  
Chief Advocacy and Engagement Officer

Cc: The Honorable Patrick Leahy, The Honorable Richard Shelby