



# SOCIAL SECURITY

The Commissioner

September 10, 2024

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chair, Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

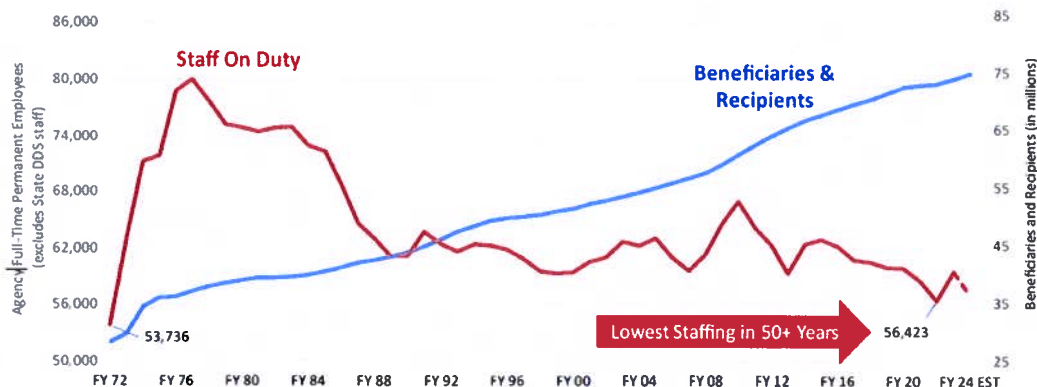
Dear Committee Chair Cole:

We appreciate the Committee's commitment to ensuring funding is available at the start of fiscal year (FY) 2025; however, we want to share our concerns about the disruption the House's six-month continuing resolution (CR) would impose on our agency and the people we serve.

Our programs are a lifeline for retirees, people with disabilities, and children, keeping tens of millions of people out of poverty. However, our customers have been waiting far too long for vital services. We are in a service crisis and are facing one of the lowest staffing levels in over 50 years due to years of chronic underfunding while the number of beneficiaries increases (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: SSA Staffing and Beneficiaries

## Lowest SSA Staffing in 50+ years as Beneficiaries Continue to Increase



If enacted, a six-month CR without any additional funding for the Social Security Administration (SSA) would be devastating. We would be forced to implement a hiring freeze with minimal exceptions. We would lose over 2,000 staff in the first half of the year alone and reach a new 50-year staffing low by the end of December. We would need to significantly reduce overtime to historically low levels, decreasing processing capacity for our most critical workloads. Without

adequate overtime for in-person interviews and critical workloads and without sufficient staff for each office, we would likely be forced to reduce the hours field offices are open to the public and would need to close offices over time, extending wait times for seniors and individuals with disabilities. As we continue to lose staff, our already unacceptable customer service would significantly worsen, for example:

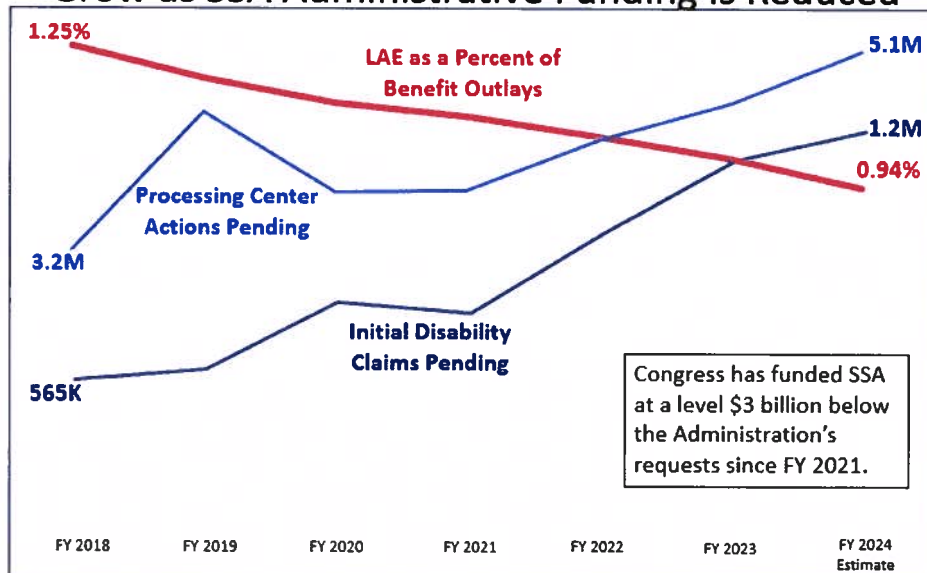
- Record-high wait times of 8 months for initial disability claimants would increase and be on pace for 9 months by the end of the year. These claimants often face dire medical and financial circumstances while waiting for benefits.
- Seniors applying for retirement and Medicare would wait longer to be approved for benefits. Declining staffing has already resulted in nearly 1 in 5 seniors not receiving a timely retirement or Medicare decision. During a six-month CR, over 200,000 additional seniors would face delays.
- 800 Number wait times would increase and people are already waiting far too long.

Through a lifetime of hard work, the American people have paid for and earned their Social Security benefits -- and they have also paid for and earned the customer service they need to access those benefits. Another six months at current funding levels as the House has proposed would be devastating for the many Americans we serve every day.

We have made do with flat, declining, or nominal increases in administrative funding for years. In fact, our administrative funding as a percent of our benefit outlays has been declining from 1.25 percent in FY 2018 to 0.94 percent in our FY 2024 enacted Budget, and as a result, we have seen backlogs increase in key workloads (see Figure 2). While we are making common-sense service improvements wherever we can, a CR without the additional funding the Administration has requested would leave us unable to rebuild our workforce, improve our performance, and decrease lengthy wait times and backlogs.

Figure 2: SSA Backlogs and Limitation on Administrative Expenses (LAE) as a Percent of Benefit Outlays

### Initial Disability Claims and Processing Center Backlogs Grow as SSA Administrative Funding is Reduced



It is essential that SSA receives adequate funding to restore the level of customer service that taxpayers expect and deserve and have paid for. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or your staff may contact Chad Poist, our Deputy Commissioner for Budget, Finance, and Management, at (410) 594-2374.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin O'Malley", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Martin O'Malley  
Commissioner

cc:

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro

The Honorable Robert Aderholt