

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Nancy A. Berryhill
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235-0001

January 8, 2018

Dear Commissioner Berryhill,

Thank you for the important work that the Social Security Administration (SSA) carries out in service of almost 65 million Americans every year. We appreciate that your agency goes to great lengths to ensure that hard-working Americans who have spent decades contributing to their financial security receive the benefits to which they are entitled. We also appreciate that the SSA makes good on our national promise of a safety net for the most vulnerable among us. It makes sure that the elderly and disabled do not go hungry or homeless. Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, contributes a little over \$500 to the livelihoods of over eight million disabled, blind, and elderly individuals each month. For many of these individuals this small sum is the difference between hunger or food, housing or homelessness, life or death.

That is why we were troubled to read a recent article which stated that over one million individuals are at risk of injury, disability, and death due to a growing backlog of cases waiting on benefit eligibility determination. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, some of these individuals have been waiting helplessly for over two years simply for an appeal hearing to determine their eligibility. We represent communities in and surrounding the City of Philadelphia. In the city alone, according to the article, "more than 10,000 people are caught in the backlog. Similar numbers are waiting in South Jersey and the Philadelphia suburbs." We recognize that you are aware of the severity of the backlog, calling it a "public service crisis."

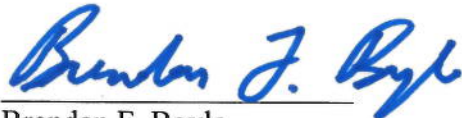
While we are certainly sympathetic to the budgetary constraints of your agency, we are deeply concerned by the number of individuals subject to undue stress and health risks brought on by reports of bureaucratic inefficiency. According to the article, "SSA's target is an appeal decision within 270 days...of *requesting* a hearing. The national average is 591 days." Meanwhile, according to the SSA's own figures, almost 9,000 individuals "died nationwide in 2016 awaiting a decision on benefits." This disparity, and its stark consequences, is unacceptable.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* article cites that the SSA acknowledges that there is a shortage of administrative law judges and support staff which precludes your agency from addressing or staying ahead of the backlog. We stand ready and committed to helping resolve this shortage. We therefore request that your agency detail the number of such staff members that would be necessary to begin to reverse this problem. Further, the article states that the agency "hired 396 administrative law judges in the last two years, well below the 500 it says it needed." We request

an explanation as to why the agency has fallen short in employing at least one hundred more judges when it recognizes the need to do so. In addition, we request that you provide us the amount of funding you require that would address the backlog so that we may do all we can to fight for this additional funding for Fiscal Year 2019.

It is our goal and commitment to work with your agency, not against it, in the common goal of reducing the appeals hearing backlog. To that end, our final request is a meeting with you and your staff to brief us on the specific needs and goals of your agency so that we can set in motion, together, a realistic and practicable plan of action. We look forward to your timely response, and working together in furtherance of finding solutions that enable individuals in need to live their lives with dignity. Please direct your responses to Alana Byrd of Congressman Boyle's Washington, DC office. We thank you for your prompt response to these requests.

Sincerely,



Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress



Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



Robert A. Brady
Member of Congress



Donald Norcross
Member of Congress