



July 7, 2021

Dear Appropriations Committee Member:

The National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) represents the attorneys working for the Social Security Administration's Office of Hearings Operations (OHO). These are highly skilled professionals whose work both ensures that eligible disabled Americans receive the Disability Insurance benefits they are entitled to as well as saving millions of dollars by finding fraudulent payments and ineligible benefits. OHO strives to issue legally sufficient decisions and award benefits to disabled claimants as early in the process as possible. But in recent years the hearing process has been encumbered by insufficient resources, inadequate staffing, expanding case files, expansive changes in regulations, conflicting operational messages, and escalating internal tensions.

I am writing to urge you to support a Limitation on Administrative Expenses (LAE) of no less than the Administration's request of \$14.189 billion with at least \$1.11 billion for payroll costs to fund the employee costs in OHO. This would allow the progress SSA has made in recent years on the backlog of disability claims to continue. However, since the pandemic resulted in an increase in initial Disability Insurance (DI) claims, it is expected that in this and subsequent fiscal years there will be a growing workload of disability reviews conducted by OHO. Currently, OHO has an unacceptable level of turnover which has negatively impacted the ability of the office to fully perform its function. Unless SSA management improves its ability to attract and retain a qualified workforce, regression and backsliding on disability reviews is certain to happen.

The Attorney-Advisors at OHO represented by NTEU are generally a young workforce. Our members believe an important tool for recruiting and retaining the best employees would be a student loan debt repayment benefit for employees. We ask that the Committee provide appropriate funding for such a program.

Again, I urge that the Committee fund SSA at least as the amount requested by the President so that SSA can operate in an efficient and cost saving manner and retain its young but highly skilled workforce. If you have any further questions on this matter, please feel free to contact Kurt Vorndran in NTEU's Legislation Department at kurt.vorndran@nteu.org or 202.572.5560. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony M. Reardon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Anthony M. Reardon
National President