

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

OCTOBER 22, 2021

Dr. Kilolo Kijakazi
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
1300 D. Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Commissioner Kijakazi:

We write to request the Social Security Administration (SSA) expedite the reopening of SSA offices for in person services. As of September 24, 2021, the SSA was only open for “limited in-office appointments” with 83% of the field office staff teleworking¹. We are concerned the lack of in-person staff and in-person appointments at SSA offices will continue to delay and thereby reduce assistance to American citizens, our constituents. Individuals who require in person interactions, often, do not have access to a computer or lack the technical knowledge to utilize online assistance. This is particularly true for one of our most vulnerable and growing populations—the elderly. Take the following research into account:

- SSA research shows that social security benefits represent nearly 30% of the income of people 65 and older.²
- In December of 2020, SSA research also showed that almost nine out of ten individuals aged 65 and older were collecting social security benefits.³
- In April of 2021, a study revealed that 25% of adults 65 and older report never going online.⁴

If the SSA is providing 30% of the income to the elderly, but 25% of adults 65 and older never go online, then how are they supposed to get proper access to SSA services that their livelihoods rely on?

Telephone communications are seldom easier to use, riddled with automated voices and number prompts to remedy situations that are seemingly irrelevant to the issue at hand. Such an example comes directly from one of my own constituents. This elderly constituent was unable to

¹ Najar, Joel. Associate Commissioner, SSA Office of Congressional Affairs. *Email Correspondence*. October 7, 2021.

² *Fact Sheet: Social Security*. Social Security Administration. June, 2021. Found Here: [Social Security Basic Facts \(ssa.gov\)](https://www.ssa.gov/fact-sheet/social-security/)

³ Id.

⁴ Perrin, Andrew and Sara Atke. “7% of American Don’t Use the Internet. Who are They?” Pew Research Center. April, 2021. Found Here: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/02/7-of-americans-dont-use-the-internet-who-are-they/>

communicate that he is having an automatic draft from his SS check for a prescription drug program that he does not want. His SS check has been deducted by almost \$80 a month for a year and he cannot get the proper help to sort the problem out. Since April of 2021, this same elderly constituent has been working with Congressional Staffers to amend his predicament. Infuriatingly, even with the assistance of a Congressional Office the phone calls to the SSA go unanswered and have not been returned for weeks at a time. We can provide you with a timeline of date and time entries where calls were made and to whom and when they were answered-- which was never. We chose not to include the timeline here as it an utter embarrassment for your agency. This is only one case of many occurring in every Congressional district office across the country. People are stuck in a perpetual cycle of telephone communications that result in weeks of wait-time between each call with little to show for their efforts except frustration, wasted time, and missing money. There is undoubtedly no replacement for in person services and this has become remarkably apparent to us and our constituents.

The SSA states in the Covid-19 Workplace Safety Plan that, “Prior to the pandemic, these offices served over 800,000 visitors a week, many of whom arrived at our offices without an appointment.”⁵ This living document restricts these 800,000 weekly visitors to only “certain critical services.” The criteria for these appointments are limited to customers with “... a limited, critical need and the customer is unable to use...automated services to meet that need.”⁶ This, on its face, bars individuals who are unable to use services due to lack of technical knowledge or access to automated services unless they also have a critical need. This language is exceptionally narrow, and it begs the question of how many of our constituents are getting the aid that they really need in a timely manner, if at all.

The SSA submitted their finalized re-entry plan by July 19th, 2021. As of September 24th, 2021, two months after the submission of SSA’s re-entry plan, only 17% of SSA’s field office staff are working in person. This progress is not promising for those 800,000 weekly visitors who utilized in person services. According to the Office of Management and Budget memo M-21-25, granting remote worker status is within the agency’s discretion. Also included is agency discretion to revoke authorization for remote work.⁷ Given this information, the SSA is fully equipped to allow more than 17% of SSA field office staff to provide in person services.⁸

We understand that workplace safety is greatly important, but this does not negate the urgent need for face-to-face interactions. With vaccines, face masks, social distancing, and office cleanliness, there is a balance by which safety and in-person assistance can be achieved reasonably. With that in mind, we are not asking for an immediate reopening, we are asking for a middle ground that considers and values the customers of SSA’s services just as much as the

⁵ *Social Security Administration (SSA): COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan*. March 4, 2021. Found Here: <https://www.ssa.gov/coronavirus/assets/materials/ssa-covid-19-workplace-safety-plan.pdf>

⁶ Id.

⁷ M-21-25: *Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies*. June 10, 2021. Found Here: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/M-21-25.pdf>

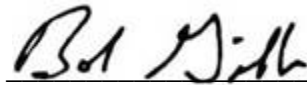
⁸ Id.

employees. Right now, it is apparent that the proper timely service due to the American taxpayer is not being exacted by the Social Security Administration.

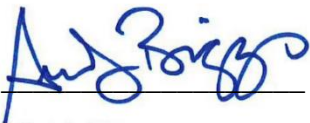
Sincerely,



Pat Fallon, Member



Bob Gibbs, Member



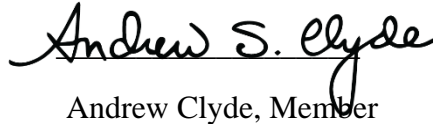
Andy Biggs, Member



Glenn Grothman, Member



Fred Keller, Member



Andrew Clyde, Member



Nancy Mace, Member

CC: Director Robert Forrester