

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY, PENSIONS, AND FAMILY POLICY  
“Policy Options for Improving SSI”  
Ranking Member Todd Young  
Remarks as Prepared

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate this opportunity to discuss and review the Supplemental Security Income program – or SSI.

Now more than ever, how every taxpayer dollar is spent matters.

And programs that don’t achieve results must be fixed.

The SSI program needs examination to ensure it is achieving its intended goals in a fiscally responsible manner.

Is the program functioning as Congress and taxpayers expect? And those with disabilities deserve?

We can’t continue to just “spend more” and hope it helps.

We need to review the program’s effectiveness so we can ensure taxpayer resources are properly targeted.

The goal of the SSI program is to provide assistance to elderly and disabled individuals who have limited financial resources.

It is intended, as the Social Security Administration identifies, as a program of last resort, and beneficiaries do not rely solely on SSI benefits to live.

Although SSI was created with the elderly low income in mind, today it primarily benefits nonelderly disabled adults and children.

The total number of beneficiaries has grown from 4.8 million in 1990, to 6.6 million in 2000, to 7.8 million today.

In turn, SSI spending has risen from \$33 billion in 2000 to an estimated \$61 billion in 2021.

SSI and Social Security Disability Insurance have been on the Government Accountability Office’s “High Risk” list since 2003.

GAO states that, *“management attention and efforts are needed across the government to ensure that disability programs provide benefits in a timely manner, reflect current ideas about disability, and achieve positive employment outcomes.”*

The Social Security Administration struggles to ensure current recipients remain qualified for these programs.

SSI continues to have a higher overpayment rate than other SSA programs.

That is an unfair burden to taxpayers as well as SSI recipients who incorrectly receive funds they may have to repay.

While SSI faces challenges in administration—

Labor force participation remains a pressing policy challenge.

Our economy is feeling its impact acutely as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disability and health-related issues have been top contributors to declines in labor force participation among people in their prime working years —

Causing both increased poverty rates and the perpetuation of poor health for many Americans.

This is why we need to focus on creating more job opportunities for working-age Americans with disabilities.

However, the current patchwork of safety-net programs for low-income Americans facing disabilities or health issues is flawed.

Many of these people are productive individuals with the potential to make valuable contributions to their communities through work.

And many wish to pursue benefits from the dignity of work, to the extent they are able to do so.

Without work, however, many will fall into poverty and may never again see the social and economic benefits associated with employment.

In having this discussion today —

Our first this Congress in this Subcommittee—

We would be remiss to not acknowledge that some of our nation's most important federal programs, including programs administered by SSA, are financed through dedicated revenue sources and managed through trust funds.

Several of the largest trust funds are heading towards insolvency—worsened by the pandemic.

According to the most recent Social Security Trustees' Report, the combined Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance trust funds will be exhausted in 2034—a year earlier than was projected last year.

This spring, I joined Senator Romney and a group of colleagues in reintroducing the *Time to Rescue United States' Trusts (TRUST) Act* –

Bipartisan legislation which would create a process to rescue the endangered federal trust funds and rein in the national debt.

And allow Congress to put our major federal programs on a stronger footing.

If we don't act now, the trust funds in these programs will be exhausted, leading to significant benefit cuts under current law, and America's safety net will be significantly weakened.

We believe in people –

And we believe most people don't want to be trapped.

SSI should be available for those in need – with a goal of preparing as many individuals as possible for a life of dignity in the workforce.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on these topics and examining this program in greater detail today.

Lastly - I would like to make note of the complete lack of committee process for the reconciliation bill being drafted by Senate and House Democrats.

My Republican colleagues on this Committee have called for hearings and a markup of any reconciliation provisions in this Committee's jurisdiction.

Americans deserve an open and transparent process.

With that, I thank the witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to hearing their testimony.