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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

JOSHUA SHEINKMAN, STAFF DIRECTOR  
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August 8, 2023

Dr. Kilolo Kijakazi  
Acting Commissioner  
Social Security Administration  
6401 Security Blvd.  
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Acting Commissioner Kijakazi:

We write to request an update on the Social Security Administration's (SSA) efforts to simplify the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) application and SSA's plan to provide the application online to all who want to apply for these critical benefits.

The SSI program provides income support to adults aged 65 or older, blind or disabled adults, and blind or disabled children with limited financial resources. Today, over 7.5 million individuals receive monthly SSI payments averaging \$677 per month. In 2022, SSI provided financial support and Medicaid coverage to over 80,000 Oregonians, 291,000 Ohioans, and 328,000 Pennsylvanians.

As you well know, SSI claimants face significant administrative barriers to accessing this critical lifeline. In addition to the program's stringent income and asset limits, the current SSI application form for evaluating non-medical eligibility criteria is over 20 pages long, and in paper form. The Senate Finance Committee held a hearing in April 2021 that highlighted the burdens this application places on potential beneficiaries. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated those barriers by restricting in-person services in the field offices, limiting families' access to in-person assistance from SSA employees. Staffing at SSA is also at a 25-year low, exacerbating the challenges faced by already overburdened field office staff.

We are grateful that the Biden Administration has taken a renewed approach to improving service delivery for Social Security programs, including the SSI program. For example, in 2021, SSA converted the current SSI application into a fillable PDF document. In 2022, SSA implemented an online SSI Protective Filing (eSPF) tool for SSI applicants to express their intent to apply and request an appointment to file an application; this has assisted over 1 million people so far. The Administration is also developing possible regulations to streamline SSI's rules related to in-kind support and maintenance.

It is more important than ever that the SSI program is modernized and accessible to all Americans, which both the U.S. Government Accountability Office<sup>1</sup> and the Social Security Advisory Board<sup>2</sup> identified as a key tool to expand access for disabled individuals seeking to apply for SSI benefits while lowering administrative costs. To that end, we request the following information concerning SSA's plan to improve the SSI application, no later than 90 days of receipt of this letter:

1. SSA's analysis of the current application process and identifying barriers for access for key segments of the SSI population, including, but not limited to, adults over age 65, disabled adults, disabled children, individuals experiencing homelessness, and children in the foster care system.
2. Documentation of the feedback that SSA has received from users following SSA testing different models for the simplified SSI application, both for the 'eligibility' portion and 'development' portion.
3. A project roadmap and architectural design for the simplified SSI application, both for the 'eligibility' portion and 'development' portion, including its deliverables for the next two fiscal years. Please include additional details to the roadmap and architectural design if SSA plans to build separate applications based on categorical eligibility (e.g. age, marital status, history of SSI entitlement, SSDI entitlement status, etc.) or modality (i.e. online, telephone, or paper application).
4. The title(s) of the SSA executive(s) overseeing the simplified SSI application project.
5. The project assumption log created during project initiation (e.g. discovery documents).
6. A list of internal and external stakeholders who SSA engaged with—or expects to engage with—during the research, design, development, and implementation phase of the simplified SSI application project.
7. Frequency of feedback testing from users
  - a. Quantitative and qualitative metrics tracked to evaluate program design and efficacy.
8. Projected major milestones, including transition from start-up and implementation to continuous maintenance.
9. Budget for the simplified SSI application project for the next five fiscal years.

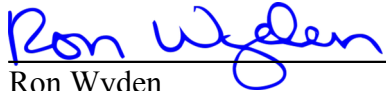
We look forward to working with you to meet the needs of SSI beneficiaries and all those who use SSA's services.

Sincerely,

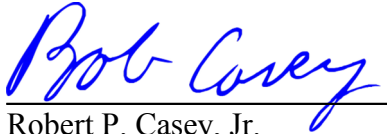
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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, Remote Service Delivery Increased during COVID-19, but More Could Be Done to Assist Vulnerable Populations (GAO-23-104650), 38.

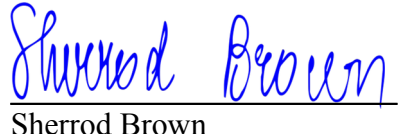
<sup>2</sup> Social Security Advisory Board, 2023 Statement on the Supplemental Security Income Program (May 2023); 2022 Statement on the Supplemental Security Income Program (July 2022).



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator  
Chairman, Committee on  
Finance



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator