



Leadership Council of Aging Organizations

William (Larry) Minnix, Jr., Chair

March 14, 2007

The Honorable Max Baucus, Chair
The Honorable Charles Grassley, Ranking Member
Senate Finance Committee
439 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Kent Conrad, Chair
The Honorable Judd Gregg, Ranking Member
Senate Budget Committee
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus, Ranking Member Grassley, Chairman Conrad, Ranking Member Gregg:

As you develop the fiscal year 2008 budget resolution, the undersigned members of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations urge you to include full funding for the administrative expenses of the Social Security Administration. This funding is essential to address serious backlogs at the agency, to enable it to meet its new responsibilities under Medicare Part D, and to sustain Social Security as a crucial and needed lifeline for millions of Americans.

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) is a coalition of national nonprofit organizations concerned with the well being of America's older population and committed to representing their interests in the policy making process. Our 54 members engage in resource sharing and joint advocacy on a range of issues affecting older persons. All told, LCAO members touch more than 134 million Americans through service provision and advocacy.

At the end of FY 2006, there were 1.3 million people awaiting a decision on their initial claim or appeal for Social Security or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability benefits. The agency is understaffed and is having difficulty retaining the staff it currently has. As a result, the average processing time for hearings has increased dramatically from 308 days in FY 2001 to 524 days in FY 2007. The \$9.597 billion that President Bush requested for SSA's Limitation on Administrative Expenses budget will not address the increasing backlogs or the inadequate staffing levels. If the President's budget is adopted, staffing would decline by more than 8% from the FY 2006 level.

SSA's workload has grown significantly due to the large number of retirees and new requirements under Medicare and Homeland Security legislation. For the past four years, the President's budget proposal has been lower than the SSA Commissioner's request. For FY 2008 the Commissioner asked for \$10.44 billion - \$843 million above the President's request. Furthermore, Congress has consistently funded SSA even below the level of the President's request, mainly because SSA has to compete for funds with other needed programs under the Labor - HHS Appropriations bill.

We urge the inclusion of special provisions in the budget resolution specifically to address the backlog issue. We would like to see funding provided up to the level of the Commissioner's request and additional funding specifically for Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs) and SSI redeterminations. This is the only way that SSA can make progress toward working down the disability claims backlog. CDRs and SSI redeterminations actually produce significant savings. Therefore, there would be no increase in the deficit.

Chairman Baucus, Ranking Member Grassley
Chairman Conrad, Ranking Member Gregg
March 14, 2007
Page2

Please allow the SSA to be fully funded next year, including provisions to address the backlogs. Your older and disabled constituents and their families are counting on you.

Sincerely,

AARP
AFL-CIO
AFSCME Retiree Program
Alliance for Retired Americans
American Association for International Aging
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
American Federation of Teachers Program on Retirement & Retirees
American Society of Consultant Pharmacists
American Society on Aging
Asociacion Nacional Pro Personas Mayores/National Association for Hispanic Elderly
Association of Jewish Aging Services of North America
B'nai B'rith International
International Union, United Auto Workers
Military Officers Association of America
National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys
National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs
National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc.
NCCNHR
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National Senior Citizens Law Center
OWL, The Voice of Midlife and Older Women
United Jewish Communities

cc: Senate Budget Committee
Senate Finance Committee