

The logo features a stylized sunburst or starburst design within a circular frame, set against a green square background.

Leadership Council of Aging Organizations

Max Richtman, Chair

February 3, 2016

The Honorable Ron Wyden
United States Senate
Washington, D.C., 20510

Dear Senator Wyden:

On behalf of the Leadership Council on Aging Organizations (LCAO), a coalition of 72 national nonprofit organizations concerned with the well-being of America's older population and committed to representing their interests in the policymaking arena, I am writing to express our concerns regarding the nomination of Andrew Lamont Eanes for the position of Deputy Commissioner of the Social Security Administration (SSA).

It is difficult to overstate the importance to the American people of the work performed on their behalf by SSA's 65,000 employees. The agency touches the lives of nearly every American, often during times of personal change, uncertainty, or hardship. The scope of the agency's work is enormous. In 2015, SSA paid nearly \$1 trillion to the 60 million Social Security beneficiaries for whom these payments are a critically important lifeline. It completed over 5 million claims for retirement and survivors benefits, over 2.7 million applications for disability benefits, and nearly 1.5 million reconsideration and appeals decisions. Its toll-free teleservice centers provided assistance to 38 million callers in 2015, while another 60 million individuals came to one of the agency's 1,200 local field offices for assistance.

Providing leadership to an agency with such enormous responsibilities is a daunting undertaking, and it is vitally important that lines of authority and leadership are clearly understood by all of SSA's employees. Our specific concern is that moving forward with Mr. Eanes' nomination to serve as Deputy Commissioner, in the absence of a confirmed Commissioner, is problematic and fraught with substantial risks.

The Deputy Commissioner is the agency's second in command and must work closely with and report to the Commissioner. It is simply good management to fill the top position first. The appointment of a Deputy with no permanent Commissioner with whom to work, we fear, could create significant instability in the agency's leadership.

We understand that if Mr. Eanes is confirmed as Deputy Commissioner, he would replace Acting Commissioner Carolyn Colvin as Deputy Commissioner. Our further understanding is that if she is displaced as Deputy Commissioner, she could no longer continue to serve as Acting

Commissioner. Ms. Colvin has been in this role since February 2013, and before that she served as Deputy Commissioner beginning in 2010. Having a new Acting Commissioner so late in this Administration could be very disruptive. We understand that even with Mr. Eanes' confirmation, continuity of leadership can be preserved if the Administration acts to do so. But until this happens, we believe that confirming a Deputy Commissioner nominee should be deferred.

The SSA has a long and well-deserved reputation for delivering first class service to the American people. On behalf of all LCAO member organizations, I ask that the Finance Committee not move to confirm Mr. Eanes until the issues surrounding the agency's executive leadership have been resolved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Max Richtman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Max Richtman
Chair, Leadership Council of Aging Organizations