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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY

June 16, 2011

The Honorable Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.
Inspector General
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
300 Altmeyer Building
Baltimore, Maryland 21235

Dear Mr. O'Carroll:

On May 19, 2011, an article in *The Wall Street Journal* highlighted the hearing workload of an administrative law judge (ALJ) in the Huntington, West Virginia, Hearing Office "...who sits in the impoverished intersection of West Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio, decided 1,284 cases and awarded benefits in all but four." This same article brought up a number of additional points pertaining to the ALJ's allowance rate as well as the relationship between the ALJ and an attorney representing claimants.

We are very concerned about the particulars of this story as well as any potentially similar occurrences that may be taking place elsewhere in the Nation. Over the years, the Social Security Administration (SSA) has made great strides in tackling the hearings backlog, but it is essential that this progress adhere to the Agency's policies and procedures while also demonstrating good stewardship of precious taxpayer dollars. Any deviation from sound practices, to include inappropriate relationships between ALJs and attorneys representing claimants, jeopardizes the very integrity of the hearings process and brings the results of that process into question. The situation described in the article also raises serious concerns about the degree and effectiveness of SSA's management oversight. SSA must be sure it is exercising proper management and oversight of the hearing process to ensure adherence to Agency policies and procedures.

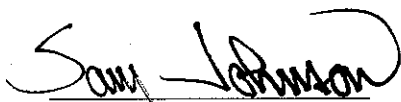
To assist in our oversight of the hearings process at the SSA, we would appreciate your further assistance in reviewing ALJ workloads, adherence to Agency policies and procedures, and related monitoring. Specifically, when ALJs differ very significantly from their peers in their productivity or outcomes, this can raise concerns about the quality of their results, and the effectiveness of SSA management of the hearing process. We would like you to provide the Subcommittee information on ALJs who are significant outliers either in terms of their productivity or their decisional outcomes. For those ALJs identified, assess what factors may account for any variances in these rates, as well as how the ALJs obtained the cases they worked and whether they held hearings. Please also describe and assess the use and effectiveness of

management controls regarding ALJ adherence to SSA policies and procedures and any constraints, including statutory limitations, which make it difficult to ensure ALJs' adherence to those policies and procedures.

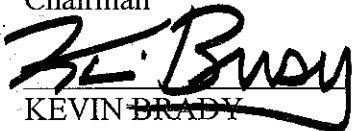
Lastly, describe and assess the effectiveness of the SSA's quality review system for ALJ decisions, including reviews by the Appeals Council and the Office of Quality Performance.

We welcome your findings related to these requests and understand that this request may necessitate more than one review from your office. Thank you for assisting the Subcommittee in this endeavor. Should you have any questions, please contact Kim Hildred, Subcommittee Staff Director, at 202.225.9263 or Kathryn Olson, Subcommittee Democratic Staff Director, at 202.225.4021.

Sincerely,



SAM JOHNSON
Chairman



KEVIN BRADY
Member of Congress



PATRICK J. TIBERI
Member of Congress



AARON SCHOCK
Member of Congress



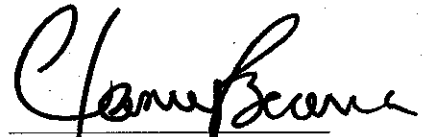
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