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Congress of the United States

U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

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November 18, 2011

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JANICE MAYS,
MINORITY CHIEF COUNSEL

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General
Government Accountability Office
441 G St. NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

The Social Security Administration (SSA) appoints representative payees when it determines that a beneficiary is not capable of managing or directing the management of their Social Security or Supplemental Security Income benefits. The SSA also pays benefits through a representative payee for beneficiaries who are legally incompetent or under the age of 15. Representative payees have responsibility for a considerable and growing number of Social Security beneficiaries and a large amount of Social Security benefits. In 2011, there are about 5.6 million representative payees, managing about \$61 billion annually for about 7.6 million beneficiaries.

Despite requirements in the law and regulations regarding representative payee reporting such as triennial visits to organizations and individual payees who serve multiple beneficiaries, random payee reviews, and targeted reviews in response to third party or beneficiary complaints, the SSA's oversight of representative payees remains a clear challenge. In one horrific example, a representative payee in Philadelphia, Linda Weston, and three others were recently charged with kidnapping, false imprisonment and other offenses after Ms. Weston's landlord found four victims locked in a boiler room last month. At least one, and possibly more, of these victims had designated Ms. Weston as their representative payee.

With the aging of the general population and resulting increase in the need for representative payees in the future, we would like your help in determining the effectiveness of Social Security's representative payee program, along with your assessment of those in the local community who serve the payee needs of the aged and disabled, including the courts and volunteer organizations.

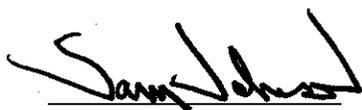
More specifically, we are requesting your assistance in providing information on the following:

- (1) The history of the representative payee program;
- (2) SSA's current and future challenges relating to the management of the program;
- (3) SSA's effectiveness in ensuring that the representative payee needs of beneficiaries are being met; and
- (4) Other options for managing the payments of beneficiaries who are unable to do so for themselves.

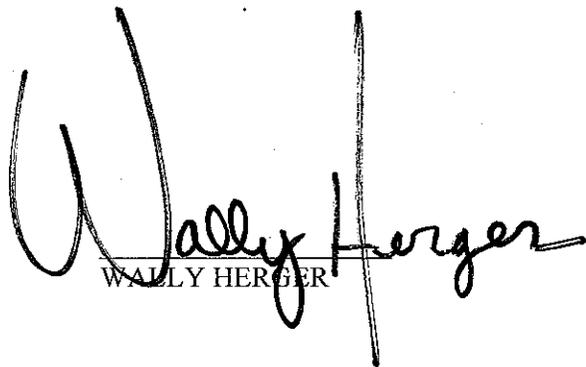
We would also like your evaluation of the need to register as representative payees the parents and legal guardians of beneficiaries who are minors, as opposed to simply relying on the custodial relationship that currently exists in law.

Should you have any questions, please contact Kim Hildred, Staff Director, Subcommittee on Social Security, at (202) 225-9263. Thank you very much for your assistance in this matter.

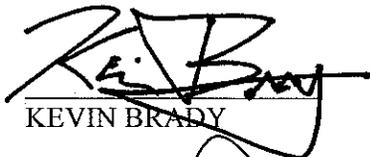
Sincerely,



SAM JOHNSON
Chairman
Subcommittee on Social Security



WALLY HERGER



KEVIN BRADY



PAT TIBERI



GEOFF DAVIS



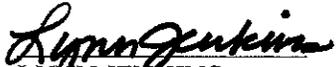
JIM GERLACH



ADRIAN SMITH



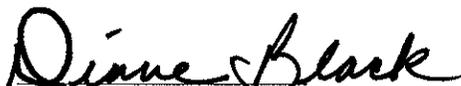
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