

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WASHINGTON, DC 20515

August 16, 2022

The Honorable Kilolo Kijakazi
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Acting Commissioner Kijakazi:

We write to urge the Social Security Administration (SSA) to ensure that visitors to SSA offices are served effectively and safely, and are not waiting in line outside in the summer heat in many areas of the country.

We appreciate the efforts SSA has taken to accept in-person visits and reopen field offices to the public in April 2022. After two years of field offices being closed to most visitors, many people are in urgent need of in-person service. However, due to COVID-19 safety precautions, the capacity in air-conditioned waiting areas and at service windows has been reduced, and when offices reach capacity, visitors line up outside.

Although most SSA field offices can assist visitors, in some locations people have been standing outside in the heat for hours at a time, without the guarantee of getting their needs met.¹ News reports have highlighted how, in high-demand areas, many people, some of whom are elderly or have a disabling condition, have had to wait more than six hours in near 100-degree weather to get help, and in some circumstances, people have had to come back multiple days to get the service they need.² At one SSA office in Texas, an individual fainted outside while waiting for hours in the heat.³ In Florida, some people slept outside the night before to secure a spot in line in hopes of obtaining an appointment the following day.⁴ We appreciate that SSA has taken steps

¹ Abrahams, Tom, *People wait outside Social Security offices in near-record heat* (June 13, 2022), <https://abc13.com/social-security-administration-offices-near-record-heat-houston-long-lines/11955620/>.

² Canales, Jesse and Mills, Ashleigh, *Long waits continue at Orlando Social Security office* (July 6, 2022), <https://www.mynews13.com/fl/orlando/news/2022/07/05/dozens-wait-in-long-lines-at-orlando-social-security-facility>.

³ Puente, Claudia and Mendoza, Kamryn, *Many wait hours in sweltering heat outside Lubbock Social Security Administration building* (June 23, 2022), <https://www.everythinglubbock.com/news/many-wait-for-hours-in-sweltering-heat-outside-of-social-security-administration-building/>.

⁴ McCray, Q and Brieskorn, Katlyn, *Long line returns to Orlando Social Security office* (July 7, 2022), <https://www.wftv.com/news/local/dozens-line-up-outside-orlando-social-security-office-again/XWUD6FXJCFZBANKXKFBNDQ3M/>.

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to improve waiting conditions at some offices, such as providing canopies and access to restrooms and water fountains, but it is clear that more must be done.

We strongly urge SSA to take additional action to address the safety needs of individuals who are seeking field office services. We respectfully request your response to the following by no later than August 30, 2022:


- 1) What steps is SSA taking to address the immediate safety needs of individuals who are waiting in dangerous environmental conditions? Specifically:
 - a) What steps is SSA taking to reduce the wait times for individuals who are seeking in-person service?
 - b) What steps is SSA taking to ensure that individuals are not waiting outside without shelter in extreme weather?
- 2) What guidance should we provide to our constituents who are having trouble accessing SSA's services?
- 3) How many and what offices have had members of the public waiting outside for more than one hour at a heat index at or above 90 degrees since reopening to the general public (April 2022)?
- 4) Please provide SSA's current field office COVID-19 safety policy and protocols.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent situation. If you have any questions, please contact Social Security Subcommittee Majority Staff Director Kathryn Olson at (202) 225-3625 and Minority Chief Social Security Counsel Shaun K. Freiman at (202) 225-4021. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Richard E. Neal
Chair
Committee on Ways and Means



Kevin Brady
Ranking Member
Committee on Ways and Means