

DisabilityRights

ARKANSAS

Tom Masseau
Executive Director

January 11, 2018

Representative Sam Johnson
Chairman
Social Security Subcommittee
House Ways and Means Committee
2304 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

Representative John Larson
Ranking Member
Social Security Subcommittee
House Ways and Means Committee
1501 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

Dear Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member Larson:

On behalf of Disability Rights Arkansas, Inc. (DRA) I am writing in strong support of H.R. 4547, the Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act of 2017. Enactment of this legislation will provide critical protections for Social Security beneficiaries as well as needed reforms to the crucial representative payee program.

Disability Rights Arkansas' mission is to vigorously advocate for and enforce the legal rights of people with disabilities in Arkansas. We accomplish this mission by providing legal and advocacy services, monitoring facilities throughout the state where individuals with disabilities reside, investigate allegations of abuse, neglect and exploitation, and training and outreach activities. In FY 2017, we advocated for over 1,000 individuals with disabilities on issues ranging from special education, employment discrimination, housing, and supports to live in the community, and abuse, neglect and exploitation.

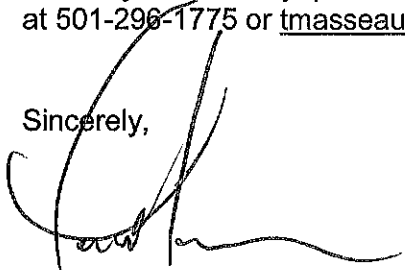
We have visited a number of different institutional settings, wherein individuals were not provided essential items like clothes, food, or hygiene products. In these cases, the institutional representative payees are not providing necessities despite their obligation as a representative payee. More frequently, what we found were situations where money was being mismanaged or comingled, and expenditures undocumented, all in violation of not only best practices, but also Social Security regulations. While these violations are not necessarily indicative of theft or fraud, it is vital that a representative payee's actions be totally above-board, due to the vulnerability of the individuals who rely upon them.

News stories, Office of Inspector General and Government Accountability Office reports, and hearings held by the House Ways and Means Committee have demonstrated the need for changes in the representative payee program. Your bipartisan legislation proposes many important and needed changes that will streamline the program as well as take important steps to increase oversight of the representative payee program by funding the nationwide network of P&A systems to monitor how representative payees are administering the Social Security funds received by beneficiaries.

Again, we greatly appreciate your work together on this important issue culminating in the introduction of this critical legislation. We stand ready to work with both of you to quickly get this important legislation enacted into law.

Should you have any questions or need more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 501-296-1775 or tmasseau@disabilityrightsar.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Masseur', with a large, stylized initial 'T' and a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tom Masseur
Executive Director