



**LEGISLATION & PUBLIC
INFORMATION UNIT**

1831 K Street
Sacramento, CA 95811-4114
Tel: (916) 504-5800
TTY: (800) 719-5798
Toll Free: (800) 776-5746
Fax: (916) 504-5807
www.disabilityrightscalifornia.org

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 California, I write 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 California is the designated protection and advocacy agency for California mandated to advance the civil rights of Californians with disabilities. Since 1978, Disability Rights California has provided critical advocacy services for people with disabilities and last year alone responded to advocacy requests from nearly 25,000 Californians with disabilities. Our work helped prevent abuse and neglect, ensured access to critical benefits and helped tens of thousands of Californians with disabilities and their families learn about how they can access services.

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. Additionally, the protections for beneficiaries through the sharing of information between state and federal

agencies and the improved payee selection procedures will ensure that the beneficiaries actually receive the benefits to which they are entitled. The misuse of benefits continues to plague the Social Security and SSI recipients who need representative payee services.

Under the previous Representative Payee Program DRC uncovered: 1) instances where representative payees did not properly maintain individual beneficiary records, but instead comingled beneficiary funds making it impossible for beneficiaries to know what funds they had available to meet their personal needs or document misuse; 2) outright embezzlement of \$400,000 of beneficiaries' funds by an organizational payee; 3) instances of diverting benefits from the beneficiaries' accounts to make facility improvements; and, 4) fabrication of records to cover for misused benefits. These examples provide only a small sample of the critical advocacy that the California protection and advocacy agency can continue to provide with the enactment of H.R. 4547.

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 get this important legislation enacted into law quickly. Please feel free to contact Curt Child, Legislative Director at (916) 504-5939 if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Catherine Blakemore
Executive Director
Disability Rights California