

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

June 5, 2018

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller Dodaro:

We are writing to request a study of the operations of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds (Social Security Trustees) and the Boards of Trustees of the Federal Hospital Insurance and Federal Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Funds (Medicare Trustees), as well as the annual Social Security and Medicare Trustees Reports. The Social Security and Medicare Trustees are responsible for developing the Social Security and Medicare Trustees Reports, respectively. These reports provide the Congress and the American people with important information about Social Security's and Medicare's finances. However, there are questions about how these reports are developed, and the reports are consistently delivered months after the statutory deadline.

By statute, the Social Security Board of Trustees and the two Medicare Boards of Trustees consist of the same six members: The Secretaries of Treasury, Labor, and Health and Human Services, the Commissioner of Social Security, and two Public Trustees. The Public Trustees positions have been vacant since the completion of the 2015 Trustees Reports.

The Social Security Act requires the Social Security and Medicare Boards of Trustees to report to Congress annually on the operations and status of the Social Security, Hospital Insurance, and Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Funds. This reporting requirement was created as part of the 1939 Amendments. The statute specifies that the report must be delivered by April 1 – a deadline that has been in place since 1968. However, over the past 15 years, the report has been late twelve times, including this year when the report will be delivered more than two months after the statutory deadline.

Given the importance of having high-quality and timely information about Social Security's and Medicare's finances, it is essential that the American people and the Congress have confidence in the Trustees Reports' and that the reports are consistently delivered on time. To better understand the Social Security and Medicare Boards of Trustees and the process used to develop the annual Trustees Reports, we request that the GAO examine the following:

1. How is the Trustees Report development process affected in years where some of the Trustees' positions are vacant or held by acting officers, compared to years where the Board of Trustees is operating with six Senate-confirmed members?
2. What is the role of the Trustees Working Group and how does this group affect the final Social Security and Medicare Trustees Reports?
3. What is the rationale for and implications of the lack of transparency in the Trustees Report process? What are some options for increasing the transparency of the Trustees Report process?
4. What factors contribute to the consistent failure to deliver the Trustees Report by the April 1 deadline?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. Should you or your staff have any questions, please contact Amy Shuart, the Social Security Subcommittee Staff Director, at (202) 225-9263, or Emily Murry, the Health Subcommittee Staff Director, at (202) 225-3943.

Sincerely,



Sam Johnson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Social Security



Peter Roskam
Chairman
Subcommittee on Health