

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904

September 27, 2022

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

Dear Acting Commissioner Kijakazi:

I am writing to follow up on the March 28, 2022, letter I sent regarding the Social Security Administration's plans to improve customer service and reopen field offices that had been closed to the public because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In your September 12<sup>th</sup> response, you indicated that local SSA offices are "offering more in-person appointments and have resumed in-person service for people without an appointment." The letter indicates that, as SSA expands in-person service, the agency strongly encourages the public to go online, call the SSA for help, and schedule appointments in advance.

While I appreciate your assurance that in-person services have resumed, I am concerned about continued reports about extended wait times and other customer service concerns. Just last month, media sources reported that people outside an SSA office in Texas had to wait outside for hours in near 100-degree heat for benefits assistance. In addition, SSA's own data indicate that the average processing time for initial disability decisions hit an all-time high of 198 days in August.

The ability to access timely in-person services is vital for millions of Social Security beneficiaries, particularly those in rural areas who do not have reliable Internet access and those who may be reluctant to use online or telephone services to conduct sensitive matters. Further, there are many important SSA services that can only be completed in person, such as applying for survivor benefits or making changes to a Social Security card.

Social Security is a bedrock of our nation's social safety net. It is essential that SSA prioritize customer service and return to a pre-pandemic posture with fully staffed field offices. To that end, I am requesting that you provide to me the following information:

1. The percentage of all SSA employees who are currently working full-time in-person.
2. SSA's specific plans and timelines for shifting employees who are currently working remotely back to full-time in-person service.
3. SSA's specific plans for improving customer service, such as information technology improvements, phone service improvements, additional and expanded online capabilities, and higher staffing for in-person services.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue, and I look forward to your prompt response. I appreciate the essential services that SSA employees provide to our citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan M. Collins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M".

Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator