

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1104

February 10, 2023

Dr. Kilolo Kijakazi
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Blvd
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Acting Commissioner Kijakazi:

Thank you for your commitment to serving the nearly 70 million individuals in our country who rely on Social Security, including the 280,000 individuals in Hawaii who receive benefits. As the Social Security Administration (SSA) works to improve the National 800 Number Network service, I ask you to consider changes that could reduce call hold times for individuals in Hawaii.

I have heard from my constituents about the difficulties they have experienced in trying to contact the SSA by phone to receive assistance with their Social Security benefits. By some estimates, 1-in-3 calls to SSA went unanswered last year, and 1-in-12 callers received busy signals. These wait times can be especially problematic for those claiming disability benefits for the first time, who, on average, had to wait 204 days for initial claims to be processed – a substantial increase of 100 days over the last decade. I understand staff shortages, which will likely require more funding from Congress, are largely the reason for these long wait times. Until staffing shortages are addressed, we should do whatever we can to reduce wait times.

I recently spoke with representatives from AARP Hawaii, which continues to advocate for changes that will improve service for SSA beneficiaries in Hawaii. AARP Hawaii informed me that Hawaii residents who previously called the national 800 number were automatically redirected to the Hawaii call center, resulting in wait times of between 7 and 20 minutes. A recent change by SSA has resulted in noticeably longer call hold times because the Hawaii calls are no longer automatically redirected to Hawaii. Would it be possible to return to the process of automatically redirecting Hawaii callers to the Hawaii call center, thereby improving SSA's responsiveness and reducing wait times for these callers?

With that, I urge you to look into this issue and work with my office to see whether there are any other similar changes that could reduce call hold times. Should you have any questions, please

WASHINGTON, D.C. OFFICE:
109 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-6361

STATE OFFICE:
PRINCE JONAH KUHIO KALANIANA'OLE FEDERAL BUILDING
300 ALA MOANA BOULEVARD, RM 3-106
HONOLULU, HI 96850
(808) 522-8970
TOLL FREE: (844) 478-3478

reach out to Kehau Yap (Kehau_Yap@hirono.senate.gov) and Ben Strand (Ben_Strand@hirono.senate.gov) in my office.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

CC: Tom Klouda, Deputy Commissioner, Legislation and Congressional Affairs (Social Security Administration); Debby Ellis, SF Regional Commissioner (SSA); Heather Henley, Director, SF Teleservice Operations (SSA)