

## CCD Social Security Task Force Report December 2006

### ISSUES/ACTIVITIES IN 2006

The CCD Social Security Task Force and the disability community as a whole lost a dear friend and colleague, Eileen P. Sweeney, who passed away in June 2006. Eileen was a Co-Chair of the Social Security Task Force and a tireless advocate, with a strong moral compass. She is sorely missed, but we hope to keep her memory alive by redoubling our efforts on behalf of people with disabilities.

The Social Security Task Force continued its work on the Social Security and the Supplemental Security Income programs on behalf of people with disabilities. Areas of focus included the following:

- **Advocating that SSA's administrative budget be removed from the spending caps for discretionary domestic spending and that SSA has adequate resources for personnel and service needs.** Eileen Sweeney was asked to testify on behalf of the Task Force at a March 2006 Senate Finance Committee hearing on "Administrative Challenges Facing the Social Security Administration." The Task Force also submitted a Statement for the Record for a House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee hearing, held in May 2006, on "Service Delivery Challenges Facing the Social Security Administration." Also in May 2006, Co-Chairs sent a letter to House Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Ralph Regula in support of a supplemental appropriations bill that provided SSA with reimbursement of costs related to the 2005 hurricane season. The provision was included in the enacted legislation. The Task Force also has raised concerns about potential congressional cuts in the President's fiscal year 2007 budget request and worked with other interested organizations and Congressional staff to seek full funding for SSA. In late September, the Co-Chairs sent a letter to Senate leadership urging that the President's proposed SSA budget request be fully funded. A similar letter, signed by more than 30 CCD member organizations, was sent in early November.
- **Monitoring the final rules changing the disability claims process, known as "Disability Service Improvement" (DSI), which were published in March 2006.** DSI began on August 1, 2006, in SSA Region I (New England) states. A checklist for issues to monitor was developed and distributed to Task Force members. On June 15, 2006, the House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee held an oversight hearing and Marty Ford was asked to testify on behalf of the Task Force. In late September, Task Force Co-Chairs attended a meeting with SSA officials, which provided an update on DSI implementation and answered questions raised by disability advocates.
- **Monitoring the development of proposals that consider far reaching policy changes to promote employment among Social Security and SSI disability beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, and advocating that such proposals do not make changes that would damage the existing Social Security and SSI disability programs.** In July, the Social Security Task Force met with several other CCD Task Forces to develop a CCD consensus on a set of principles which must guide the development of any such proposals.

These principles included: no changes to the Social Security definition of disability; no work requirements or time limits in the Social Security and SSI disability programs; and no cutbacks to eligibility criteria for these programs. Over the past year, the Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB) had been working on a new, “national approach to disability programs.” Before she passed away, Eileen Sweeney served on an expert panel to assist the Board in thinking about these issues. After Eileen resigned for health reasons, Marty Ford was selected to serve on the panel. Many members of the Task Force attended a July 2006 forum held by the Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB) on this issue. In August, a letter was sent to the SSAB describing the basic principles developed at the July CCD meeting. The SSAB report was issued in September 2006. An initial CCD response, signed by nearly 30 members, was sent in November. The Task Force is working with other CCD Task Forces to develop an in-depth response.

- **Advocating to improve Social Security and SSI disability work incentives.** We have worked with other CCD Task Forces to advocate for a wide range of improvements to work incentives programs and policies, including: improving SSA systems for reporting and tracking earnings and income to prevent excessive and unnecessary overpayments; protecting disabled adult children who earn above the SGA level; and urging SSA to move forward with the demonstration programs and studies called for in the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act. In September, the Task Force Co-Chairs, with Co-Chairs of other relevant CCD Task Forces, met with members and staff of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Advisory Panel.
- **Advocating that SSA withdraw proposed regulations that would increase the disability age categories.** In November 2005, SSA published proposed regulations that would increase the age categories used to make disability determinations. More than 900 comments from disability groups and others opposing the changes were submitted before the comment period ended on January 3, 2006. The Task Force Co-Chairs submitted comments opposing the changes because they would have an extremely detrimental impact on vulnerable individuals with disabilities and a disparate impact on specific racial and ethnic groups. The Co-Chairs sent a follow-up letter to the Commissioner in August, discussing additional studies, published after the comment period closed, that undermine SSA’s reasons for the proposed changes. We have urged the Commissioner to withdraw the proposed rule.
- Monitoring implementation of provisions in Pub. L. No. 108-203, the Social Security Protection Act of 2004.
- Monitoring possible proposals to update the SSI program and implementation of the SSI children’s program.
- Monitoring SSA efforts to prevent fraud and advocating that the due process and privacy rights of individuals are protected.
- Proactively meeting with SSA officials and Congressional on a broad range of topics affecting people with disabilities who must rely on the Social Security disability programs and the SSI program.

## **GOALS FOR 2007**

The Task Force expects to continue to work on all of the issues described above. Specifically:

- If the debate on the solvency of the Social Security Trust Funds is revived, participating as fully as possible to ensure that the impact on people with disabilities is considered and their interests are protected.
- Promoting the passage of legislation to improve, simplify, and update the Social Security and SSI disability programs, including work incentives.
- Advocating for regulatory and operational changes to improve, simplify, and update the Social Security and SSI disability programs.
- Advocating that SSA's administrative budget be removed from the spending caps for discretionary domestic spending and that SSA has adequate resources for personnel and service needs.
- Monitoring implementation of changes to the disability claims process.
- Continuing to work with other CCD Task Forces to monitor proposals to change the definition of disability or make other major policy changes related to promoting employment among disability beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries. In particular, we will seek to influence the development of these proposals to ensure that they are directed toward maximizing employment opportunities while also doing no harm to existing critical income supports. Working with other CCD Task Forces, we will send an in-depth response to the SSAB's September 2006 report.
- Monitoring of the implementation of provisions in Pub. L. No. 108-203, the Social Security Protection Act of 2004.
- Monitoring the implementation of the disability programs in the Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance program and the SSI program; presenting testimony as requested to Congress; responding to notices of proposed rulemaking; and raising issues of concern to people with disabilities to SSA officials and Congressional staff.

**CO-CHAIRS:**

Marty Ford, The Arc and UCP Public Policy Collaboration

Alaine Perry, United Spinal Association

Ethel Zelenske, National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives