



## **CCD Social Security Task Force Report January 2008**

### **ISSUES/ACTIVITIES IN 2007**

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:

- **Meeting and working with a new Commissioner of Social Security.**

Michael J. Astrue was sworn in for a 6-year term as Commissioner of Social Security in February 2007. We have met with him on several occasions regarding issues of concern to people with disabilities.

- **Advocating that SSA has adequate resources for personnel and service needs.**

A major issue in 2007 was the backlog and extreme delays in the disability claims program, primarily caused by the under-funding of SSA since 2000. Several Congressional hearings in the House and Senate highlighted the problem. Significant efforts were taken to ensure that SSA received adequate funding for its FY 2008 administrative budget. The Task Force was involved in sending letters to the House and Senate Budget and Appropriations Committees throughout the year. We also worked closely with other stakeholder organizations and Congressional staff to advocate that SSA receive adequate funding. The news media also extensively covered the issue. Our efforts paid off as the final FY 2008 appropriation for SSA's administrative budget was above the President's request for the first time in a decade. Efforts have already started for the FY 2009 budget as the Task Force was involved in an October 2008 meeting with OMB to discuss SSA's budget needs.

- **Commenting on proposed rules to change the SSA appeals process.**

On October 29, 2007, SSA published proposed regulations to change the SSA appeals process. While there are a few positive changes, we have very serious concerns about most of the NPRM because many proposals elevate speed of adjudication above accuracy of decision-making. We have urged the Commissioner not to implement the NPRM unless significant changes are made to protect the rights and interests of people with disabilities. The Task Force drafted a 24-page comment letter that was submitted on December 27, 2007, with more than 30 CCD member organizations signing on. The Task Force also participated in meetings with Congressional staff about the NPRM and

sent out Alerts to CCD that could be shared with the grassroots organizations. We will meet with the Commissioner on January 11, 2008, to discuss our concerns.

- **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.**

Throughout 2007, 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. The Statement includes a comprehensive discussion of improvements to the disability programs and work incentives that CCD has supported over the years. Over the past year, the Ticket to Work Advisory Panel, in its last year of existence, worked on its Final Report. Drafts of the Final Report were circulated, which included many positive changes that CCD has supported. But the draft Final Reports also included significant and drastic changes that CCD does not support. CCD Chair and Task Force Co-Chair Marty Ford was asked to testify at the Panel's final public meeting in October 2007. Her testimony summarized the draft CCD Statement of Principles. Other Task Force members testified at the meeting during the public comment period.

- **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. The Statement of Principles includes a comprehensive discussion of improvements supported by CCD. In August 2007, the Social Security Task Force and several other CCD task forces met with Social Security Advisory Board member Marsha Katz, a long-time disability advocate.

- **Commenting and monitoring other initiatives of the Commissioner.**

The Commissioner has developed a long list of initiatives that he believes will reduce the disability claims backlog and expedite decision-making. Many initiatives are related to technological improvements. Others are changes to the decision-making process. The Task Force commented on one of these new initiatives, called "compassionate allowances." Comments to the advance NPRM were filed in October and include a number of proposals that we believe would improve and expedite the disability determination process for certain categories of applicants.

- 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 staff on a broad range of topics affecting people with disabilities who must rely on the Social Security disability programs and the SSI program. The Task Force was represented at a Hill Briefing in May for House Congressional staff on issues for the disability community.

## **GOALS FOR 2008**

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

- Advocating that SSA's administrative budget be adequately funded so that SSA has sufficient resources for personnel and service needs.
- Monitoring proposed changes to the disability claims process.
- 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.
- 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. The Statement of Principles will be used as the basis for our work.
- 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 United Cerebral Palsy Public Policy Collaboration

Susan Prokop, Paralyzed Veterans of America

Ethel Zelenske, National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives

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