

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
COMMERCE
HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

March 27, 2025

Leland Dudek
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Acting Commissioner Dudek,

I write to urge you to reconsider the Social Security Administration's plan to prevent Americans from signing up for Social Security benefits over the phone beginning April 14th. This change will create unnecessary barriers to access for millions of older and low-income Americans, including people who live in rural communities and veterans, who are trying to access their Social Security earned benefits.

On March 18, 2025, the Social Security Administration first announced that it would only allow for online and in-person identity proofing, eliminating the option for individuals to verify their identity over the phone. Just eight days later, the agency updated its plan to specifically target individuals applying for Retirement, Survivors, or Auxiliary (Spouse or Child) benefits, removing these individuals' ability to verify their identity over the phone. The Social Security Administration continues to make sweeping decisions without due diligence to vet its plans or consider the impacts on Social Security beneficiaries, and this latest slew of announcements is just another example of the Trump Administration putting Elon Musk's demands before the needs of Americans.

While SSA must ensure that it has measures in place to protect against fraud, it does not appear that SSA has conducted any kind of analysis weighing the risk of fraud in these specific cases to the additional burden this will place on Americans seeking to claim the benefits they have earned. Based on news reports, the confusion created by SSA's recent and rapid changes may have actually increased the risk of fraud as scammers attempt to take advantage of the uncertainty they have created. Moreover, this ill-considered change comes at an especially frustrating time for those attempting to contact SSA because the agency has also announced its plan to significantly reduce the Social Security Administration's workforce.

In addition to mass layoffs, Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency is targeting Social Security offices across the country to close. From staff reductions and office closures to the recently announced changes to identity verification at the agency, the most vulnerable Americans will pay the price of poor decisions made by people like Elon Musk, who has publicly referred to Social Security as a "Ponzi scheme."

SSA's administrative expenses are largely paid for by payroll taxes Americans pay into Social Security. Americans have earned their Social Security benefits through a lifetime of work and deserve timely and convenient customer service; they have literally paid for that. SSA's administrative expenses represent less than 1 percent of benefits paid. Cutting SSA's workforce and closing offices will not meaningfully reduce the deficit or make the government more efficient. But to be clear, making it harder for millions of Americans to file for Social Security, and delaying the processing of benefits, is simply another way of cutting benefits, and that appears to be the goal of this Administration. This attack on seniors is being done to make room in the budget for new tax breaks for big corporations and the wealthiest.

There is no way around it: this latest action by the Trump Administration is a direct attack on Social Security. Millions of older and low-income Americans, including people who live in rural communities and veterans, will have no choice but to use an online system of verification, many of whom will be

unable to do so, or make arrangements to visit a shrinking number of offices with already long wait times and stretched thin workforce. I ask that you take these concerns seriously and reconsider your decision to remove this longstanding identity verification option for Social Security recipients.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tammy Baldwin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T" and "B".

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator