

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

**SUBMITTED TO THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS**

Social Security and Work & Welfare Subcommittee Hearing with the Commissioner of Social Security,
Frank J. Bisignano
June 10, 2026

SUBMITTED BY
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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Estes and LaHood, Ranking Members Davis and Larson, distinguished Members of the Committee:

AFGE Council 220 respectfully submits this statement for the record in connection with the Subcommittees' June 10, 2026 joint hearing with Social Security Administration Commissioner Frank J. Bisignano.

Council 220 is the exclusive representative of approximately 25,000 Social Security Administration bargaining unit employees in the national bargaining unit, spanning field offices, Teleservice Centers, workload support units, and other components in every state and territory. Our 33 affiliate Locals represent frontline workers in 1,200 field offices, support units, card centers, and 21 Teleservice Centers nationwide—the employees who answer the phones, process the claims, and serve the public every day.

We write to bring the Subcommittee's attention to a set of interconnected crises that are undermining Social Security's ability to deliver the benefits the American people have earned. These are not theoretical concerns. They are the daily reality for the workers who serve 75 million beneficiaries and the communities that depend on them.

The core message of this statement is this: Social Security's service delivery crisis is not a program solvency issue. It is a staffing and resource issue. The Agency has lost thousands of employees, reaching a 59-year staffing low. Record backlogs, field office closures, reassignments, and deteriorating service are the direct result of chronic underfunding and accelerated workforce reductions. The path forward requires Congress to appropriate adequate funding dedicated to hire, train, and retain the workforce necessary to deliver the benefits Americans have earned—and to exercise oversight over an Agency that is increasingly turning to artificial intelligence, automated adjudication, and occupancy data as substitutes for the human workforce the public needs.

I. THE STAFFING CRISIS

SSA is experiencing the worst staffing crisis in its 90-year history. According to the Agency's own FY 2026 Limitation on Administrative Expenses (LAE) Report, SSA is estimated to lose 14.5 percent of its employees from 2024 to 2026, leaving approximately 50,278 employees to manage an increasing workload and a growing beneficiary population. The current workforce of approximately 52,100—itsself a 59-year low—is still declining. In 2025 alone, SSA lost approximately 6,500 or more employees through early retirement and separation incentive programs, and the Agency conducted no meaningful hiring to replace them. The FY 2026 budget projects a further decrease of at least 2,000 employees.

The losses have been concentrated in the positions that serve the public directly. Field offices suffered a net loss of 10 percent of their staff—2,173 employees—between August 2024 and March 2026, which marks a greater loss of employees in 2 years than in the prior 5 combined. This figure reflects the net loss even after SSA reassigned an additional 2,000 workers from other components to frontline positions as part of a massive restructuring plan.

In 2011, SSA was ranked in the top 10 Best Places to Work. In the past three consecutive years it has ranked dead last, and the trend has sharply accelerated in 2025, earning a score of 15.0 and coming in last place according to a Partnership for Public Service survey. Chronic staffing shortages, reduced workplace flexibility, the loss of flexible start times at the Tele-Service Centers, the loss of regular Telework across the agency, and a constant abrupt operational change without much advance communication have created work conditions that are creating low morale and high attrition. This is not only unstable, but also heavily contributing to a workplace environment that is entirely incapable of processing such heavy workloads. As a result of this imbalance, we have become an agency of intake, with too little timely output, causing appointments and benefits to be delayed or improper.

The consequences for the public are severe and measurable:

Service Metric	Scale
Total FO employees lost, (2019-2026)	3,850
Offices losing ≥ 10% of staff, (2019-2026)	66.7%
Offices losing ≥ 25% of staff, (2019-2026)	33.1%
FO employees lost in 2 years , (2024-2026)	2,173
Offices losing ≥ 10% of staff, (2024-2026)	51.9%
Offices losing ≥ 25% of staff, (2024-2026)	14.5%

SSA is responding to backlogs created by understaffing not by significantly hiring but by restructuring. The Agency is implementing a national appointment calendar that deprioritizes local community-based services. A California claimant may now be served by an employee in Wisconsin. This abandons 90 years of a community-based service model—the model that has been SSA’s hallmark since its founding.

In a survey of SSA employees conducted in late December 2025 and early January 2026, 65 percent reported that service quality had declined in the past 12 months.

II. GHOST OFFICES

AFGE Council 220’s staffing analysis of Social Security Field Offices found that the following offices are ghost offices, meaning critically understaffed:

- Ironwood, Michigan
- Decorah, Iowa
- Havre, Montana
- Big Spring, Texas
- Sheridan, Wyoming
- Glasgow, Montana
- Pierre, South Dakota
- Cedar City, Utah

- Cody, Wyoming

According to the union's bargaining list, serving as a basis for staffing analysis, none of the identified ghost offices have production employees or bargaining unit assigned. While some of these locations do not appear on SSA.gov's official office closure list, in practice, these offices function with very limited service capacity.

III. REASSIGNMENTS TO THE 800 NUMBER ARE HOLLOWING OUT FIELD OFFICES

Along with the staffing crisis, there exists a parallel crisis unfolding inside SSA's field offices: the systematic reassignment of field office and support unit employees to staff the national 1-800 number. More than 1,500 field office workers, along with an additional 800 support unit and payment center employees and a number of workers from other components—totaling approximately 2,500 employees and growing—have been pulled from in-person, claims taking and processing, and other local public service duties and redirected to answer calls on the national 800 number. They have no break between calls to breathe and tie up loose ends. No consistent inter-office triage system exists — causing chaos, repeat callers, and employee attrition. Communication with the workforce often happens the day of the changes. Workers are struggling with low morale from constantly shifting priorities, shrinking processing time, N8NN assignments, high attrition, and growing unprocessed work volumes.

These are employees who would otherwise be processing claims, assisting walk-in visitors, and reducing the 12-million-transaction backlog in field offices. Their reassignment to phone duty has a direct, measurable impact on wait times for in-person service, local phone service availability, appointment availability, claims processing, on field office transaction backlogs, and on the communities whose only access to Social Security is a physical office. Field offices are being hollowed out not only by attrition and budget cuts, but by internal reassignment policies that strip them of the staff they need to serve the public in communities. At the same time, Teleservice Centers lost at least 300—with new reporting indicating as many as 1,300 employees—even as they absorbed 15 million more calls than the prior year.

The result is a staffing ratio that makes adequate service impossible. On average, there is now one field office employee for every 4,000 beneficiaries—a ratio that has climbed 12 percent between March 2024 and August 2025. In eight states, each field office worker serves more than 5,000 beneficiaries. Forty-seven states, three territories, and the District of Columbia have experienced staff losses. Thirty-three states lost 10 percent or more of their SSA staff in FY 2025 compared to the prior year. Wyoming lost the most, with its beneficiary-to-worker ratio jumping 28 percent.

At least three field offices are currently closed: Decorah, Iowa, due to low staffing; Logan, West Virginia; and Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, both closed for over a year due to health and safety issues. Multiple additional rural offices have closed temporarily or reduced services (e.g., Ironwood, MI and Cody, WY). A June 2025 study found that half of all seniors must drive at least 33 minutes to reach a field office, and nearly one quarter live more than an hour roundtrip drive from the nearest office.

IV. BADGE IN/BADGE OUT AND THE USE IT ACT

AFGE Council 220 is raising an alarm for a compounding threat to SSA's field office network. The Utilizing Space Efficiently and Improving Technologies Act (USE IT Act), signed into law in January 2025 as part of the Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act (P.L. 118-272), requires federal agencies to track daily occupancy through PIV badge swipe data and sensor technology—a system commonly referred to as Badge In/Badge Out, or BIBO.

Under the USE IT Act, OMB must ensure that each federal building is at least 60 percent occupied on average over a one-year period. If utilization falls below 60 percent for six months, the agency must engage in discussions and if appropriate have written procedures to return excess space to GSA. GSA has set an even more aggressive target of 80 percent of occupancy. Buildings with capacity for 500 or more employees that fall below 20 percent of utilization must be reported to the Inspector General for investigation.

The danger to SSA's field office network is a feedback loop that the Committee should understand clearly. Congress underfunds SSA and does not direct existing funds to hire. The Agency does not hire adequate staff. The workforce shrinks. Offices become understaffed, and some close entirely. BIBO then captures low occupancy data, and the offices appear “underutilized.” The USE IT Act triggers a potential for consolidation or closure procedures. Offices that serve communities are shut down or merged. Communities lose access to Social Security services. Service delivery deteriorates further.

BIBO occupancy data will create a false narrative of unoccupied or underutilized space—not because offices are unnecessary, but because Congress has not funded or directed the agency to hire the workforce needed to fill them. An office may show 40 percent of occupancy because it lost 30 percent of its staff, not because the community no longer needs Social Security services. This risk is compounded by SSA's own stated goal of reducing field office visits by 50 percent in FY 2026—from 31.6 million to 15 million.

Field offices are community-based service points that serve elderly, disabled, and low-income Americans who cannot easily travel long distances or navigate online systems. They are not surplus real estate. BIBO occupancy data does not measure public need, and it must not be used to close offices that exist precisely because that need is real.

V. DATA TRANSPARENCY

On March 19, 2026, The Washington Post reported that a draft Inspector General report on SSA's 800-number telephone service contained performance findings that were removed from the final published version following agency review. The published report used a “speed of answer” metric showing wait times of under 10 minutes. However, the original draft included a “total wait time” metric—capturing the full caller experience—that showed average wait times of 46 minutes to over two hours. This finding was deleted after an agency review.

In addition, approximately 25 million callers in the reporting period did not receive service—they disconnected, received no callback, or encountered busy signals. A partial picture does not capture the service reality faced by the American public.

Council 220 has also received reports that frontline employees are now being instructed to handle calls within 5 to 6 minutes. SSA's mission is to resolve beneficiaries' needs completely and accurately on first contact. A 5-to-6-minute call handling directive risks prioritizing brevity over completeness, potentially increasing repeat contacts, unresolved inquiries, and walk-in traffic at overwhelmed field offices.

It is also important to recognize that gains in improving the phone answer rate on the National 800# have been largely due to employees in field operations, payment centers, claims processing support units, hearings offices and other components shifting their focus from claims work and local office service and support to answering the national 800# phones. This has come at a cost to case processing, appointment taking, and timely and accurate payments. The Agency is claiming that service has only improved in these areas, but the figures are not transparent on their website like they used to be and they have not shared the improvements with the union. The workers tell a different story of a stressed out public and long service delays.

VI. WHAT WE ASK OF CONGRESS

AFGE Council 220 respectfully asks the Committee and the Congress to act on the following:

1. **Fund aggressive hiring to support capacity.** Ensure that the 7,000 positions that were lost are filled. Restore funding to a level (1.2% of benefit outlays with dedicated sustained hiring) that supports recruitment, training, and retention, particularly in field offices, support units, and teleservice centers.
2. **Require oversight of AI and automated adjudication.** Mandate that SSA adopt the NASI Task Force's principles and guardrails before expanding AI or Straight Through Processing to additional claim types, including disability. Require independent evaluation, bias auditing, and transparency for all AI systems and contracts.
3. **Require contextual safeguards for BIBO and the USE IT Act.** Ensure that occupancy data is evaluated alongside staffing levels, public demand, and community needs. No Social Security office should be closed based on data that reflects staffing failures rather than a lack of public need.
4. **Urge SSA to restore telework and workplace flexibility.** A federal arbitrator has already ordered restoration of telework. Flextime scheduling and credit hour accrual for Teleservice Center employees must also be restored. These are zero-cost tools for recruitment, retention, productivity, and service continuity.
5. **Support the SSA workforce.** Support competitive pay, retention incentives, telework and flexible work arrangements, and fair working conditions. Fifty-four percent of frontline workers do not earn a living wage. Ninety-seven percent of Teleservice Center workers fall below the living wage threshold.
6. **Protect data transparency.** Require SSA to publish total wait time as a standard metric alongside speed-of-answer data, and to publish data on callers who did not receive service. Ensure inspector general independence and capacity at SSA. Request the unredacted draft IG report on 800-number performance. Require SSA to publish customer service satisfaction by service type on SSA.gov. Require SSA to publish appointment wait times by claim type, benefit payment timeliness, overpayment data, and other transparent relevant data that gives a holistic view of service in local communities.
7. **Continue to hold Congressional hearings on SSA operations and invite AFGE members as witnesses on behalf of their Union.** The frontline workforce has direct, firsthand knowledge of

the challenges facing the Agency and the solutions that could address them. We welcome the opportunity to testify.

CONCLUSION

Social Security is not going bankrupt. The trust fund is 100% solvent through 2033. The service crisis the American public is experiencing in real time is caused by a staffing crisis and attrition crisis which is caused by a funding crisis in the administrative budget and policies and procedures that worsen morale and cause workers to quit. It is compounded by the elimination of telework, workplace flexibility, and uncompetitive pay.

The workforce that delivers Social Security and their union is dedicated to the Agency's mission. Our members work every day to serve veterans, widows, children who have lost parents, people with disabilities, and millions of Americans who depend on the benefits they have earned. They do this work under conditions that include poverty-level wages, contract repudiation, the loss of workplace flexibility, record backlogs, and an Agency that is increasingly asking technology to do what only trained, experienced, compassionate human beings can do.

We are not asking Congress to choose between technology and people. We are asking Congress to ensure that technology supports a well-staffed, compensated, engaged workforce—not to replace one. We are asking Congress to ensure that the data used to evaluate SSA's performance, and the utilization of its offices tells the full story. And we are asking Congress to fund the Agency at a level that allows it to fulfill its mission to every American who walks through a field office door, calls the 1-800 number, or files a claim online.

The facts are before you. The path forward is clear. We urge the Committee to act.

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