

Social Security Administration (SSA)

# Congressional Update



## An Update on Advancing Equity for Underserved Communities

Social Security is committed to advancing equity for the diverse populations we serve, including those in underserved communities, people with disabilities, workers, and their families. We know how vital our programs are to your constituents, and we continue to improve the accessibility of our services by addressing systemic barriers to participation in our programs.

Consistent with the goals of Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, we are pleased to announce the release of our Equity Action Plan. Our plan supports President Biden's whole-of-government equity agenda to advance equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity for all. The plan is available at [www.ssa.gov/open/materials/SSA-EO-13985-Equity-Action-Plan.pdf](https://www.ssa.gov/open/materials/SSA-EO-13985-Equity-Action-Plan.pdf). It details the following focus areas:

- Identifying Inequities in Our Programs and Services;
- Identifying and Addressing Systemic Barriers to Program Participation;
- Ensuring Equitable Service for Unrepresented Claimants in the Disability Application Process;
- Increasing Gender Equity and Equality; and
- Increasing Equitable Access to Our Research Grant Programs and Procurement Opportunities for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Minority Serving Institutions, and Small and Disadvantaged Businesses.

In March 2022, we launched a new online protective filing tool your constituents can use to inform us that they, or someone they are helping, want to apply for Supplemental Security Income and other benefits. Using this tool establishes a protective filing date, which helps ensure eligible individuals receive benefits at the earliest point. The tool is available at [www.ssa.gov/benefits/ssi/start.html](https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/ssi/start.html). For more information, visit <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/reference.nsf/links/05182022094438AM>.

You may find additional information on our commitments to advance equity on our Social Security Matters blog at [blog.ssa.gov](https://blog.ssa.gov) and our LGBTQ+ webpage at [www.ssa.gov/people/lgbtq/](https://www.ssa.gov/people/lgbtq/). If you have further questions, please contact the Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs at (202) 358-6030.

## OUR OFFICE STATUS WEBPAGE

We are pleased that we are able to expand in-person service for your constituents. However, a limited number of our offices continue to serve customers by telephone or scheduled appointment only, due to circumstances such as construction.

For the most up-to-date information about these closings and other changes to operating status for field offices serving your constituents, please visit our Offices Closings and Emergencies page at [www.ssa.gov/agency/emergency/](https://www.ssa.gov/agency/emergency/). This information is also available in Spanish at [www.ssa.gov/espanol/agencia/emergencia/](https://www.ssa.gov/espanol/agencia/emergencia/).

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### CASEWORK CORNER

We publish a biannual Congressional Inquiries Guide for congressional use only. We send caseworkers in district offices a copy upon entering Congress. You can request a copy at [ssa.gov/legislation/congguide.html](https://ssa.gov/legislation/congguide.html)

Your local Regional Communications Director can assist you with everything from casework to connecting advocates for People Facing Barriers with SSA. To find your RCD, visit [www.ssa.gov/agency/rcds.html](https://www.ssa.gov/agency/rcds.html)



### CONGRESSIONAL STATISTICS

In FY2020, SSA received over 100,000 casework inquiries from Congress, agency-wide. OLCA's Constituent Services staff handled about 8,000 of these.

## SSI Recipients are Eligible for Discounted Internet Service

We would like to bring to your awareness the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently launched ACP to help more of your constituents access reasonably priced internet services. The ACP provides a discount of up to:

- \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households.
- \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands.

Any household with a member receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is eligible for discounted internet service through the ACP. We do not count ACP assistance as income or a resource for SSI purposes, and receipt of this assistance will not affect your constituents' SSI payments.

Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 toward purchasing a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers. To qualify for this one-time discount, households must contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price.

For more information, including the ACP application, please visit [www.fcc.gov/acp](https://www.fcc.gov/acp)

## Resumption and Expansion of Video Option for No-Change Replacement SSN Cards

In late March 2022, we resumed using video technology in certain field offices to process requests for no-change replacement Social Security Number (SSN) cards for U.S. Citizens. The use of video offers your constituents, who wish to obtain a replacement SSN card, a convenient service option without having to visit our offices. As of May 9, 2022, 1,170 field offices and card centers offer this service, and we may expand this service to additional field offices in the future. For more information, please contact the Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs at **(202) 358-3060**.

### Customer Feedback Survey

In November 2021, our field offices began displaying customer feedback survey cards with a QR code that refers customers to our Always-On Survey, available at [www.ssa.gov/feedback](https://www.ssa.gov/feedback). This survey is one way that your constituents can leave feedback on all our service channels, including our 800 number, our website, our field offices, and our hearing offices. We will use this feedback to better understand your constituents' needs and identify where we need to improve services.

## Advancing Equity in Sex Identification in Our Records

In March 2022, we announced that we will offer self-attestation of sex identity in Social Security number (SSN) records in Fall 2022. Once this policy is effective, your constituents will be allowed to self-select their sex in our records without the need to provide medical or legal documentation of their sex designation. People who update their sex identity in our records will still need to show a current document to prove their identity and apply for a replacement SSN card. As a reminder, the SSN card only includes a person's full name and SSN. The sex identity updates will occur in our internal systems.

Additionally, in February 2022, we issued guidance instructing our employees to accept evidence documents that contain non-binary identifiers for SSN card requests. We are exploring possible future policy and systems updates to support an "X" sex designation for the SSN card application process.

## Update to the Attorney Fee Limit

We are pleased to announce that, for the first time in 13 years, we are increasing the maximum fee that representatives appointed by disability applicants can charge and collect under section 206(a)(2) of the Social Security Act. Balancing the benefits of representation with the needs of your constituents was central to this decision. This increase will compensate representatives for their service while ensuring fees remain reasonable. We are hopeful that the increase in the fee cap will improve the quality and availability of representation for your constituents.

Effective November 30, 2022, the fee cap will increase from \$6,000 to \$7,200. We will publish notice of this change in the Federal Register in advance of the effective date.

