



SOCIAL SECURITY

The Commissioner

March 20, 2014

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairwoman, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

Enclosed is the Social Security Administration's plan to increase the number of individuals receiving *Social Security Statements (Statements)* on an annual basis, in accordance with the *Joint Explanatory Statement to the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014*.

Ensuring workers have access to the *Statement* for financial planning remains an important part of our mission. Our plan includes an aggressive strategy to promote the use of our online *Statement*, which can be viewed, printed, and saved once an individual has registered for a **my Social Security** account. Last year, over 6 million individuals registered for a **my Social Security** account, and the online *Statement* was viewed nearly 17 million times. In addition to aggressively increasing the availability of the online *Statement*, we plan to resume mailing *Statements* to over 47 million workers. We plan to mail approximately 3.6 million *Statements* beginning September 2014 and about 43.5 million *Statements* in fiscal year 2015.

We are sending similar letters to Senators Shelby, Harkin, and Moran, and Representatives Rogers, Lowey, Kingston, and DeLauro.

We are happy to work with your staff to answer any questions about our plan. If there are any questions, please have your staff contact Bonnie Kind, our Associate Commissioner for the Office of Budget, at (410) 965-3501. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Carolyn W. Colvin
Acting Commissioner

Enclosure

**Plan to Increase the Number of
Individuals
Annually Receiving**

Social Security Statements

Report to Congress

Social Security Administration

March 20, 2014

Plan to Increase the Number of Individuals Annually Receiving *Social Security Statements*

Introduction

The Joint Explanatory Statement to the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 directs the Social Security Administration (SSA) “to develop a plan to significantly increase the number of individuals receiving *Social Security Statements (Statement)* annually, either electronically or by mail” and states the plan “should include a significant restoration of the mailing of *Statements* either electronically or by mail.”

Throughout our history, Social Security programs have been dynamic, shifting to meet the changing needs and expectations of the American people. Our guiding principle has always been to transform the way we do business to manage our growing workloads and meet the changing needs of the public. We recognize that we must develop innovative ways to meet those changing needs, including our customers’ preferences for conducting business with us online.

Our goal is to provide online services that are convenient, flexible, and secure. We know that the public is accustomed to self-service options, and based on the American Customer Satisfaction Index; our online applications have ranked in the top five in government for many years. Three of our websites – Retirement Application, Retirement Estimator, and Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs – either matched or outperformed commercial websites, including Amazon, Apple, and FedEx. Building on our successful online applications, in 2012 we developed and launched our highly rated *my Social Security* portal. Through this portal, people who register can view, print, and save their *Social Security Statement*, get a benefit verification letter, enroll in or change their direct deposit information, and change their address – all online. This account allows quick access to personal Social Security information for everyone – people who are still working as well as those already receiving benefits. We will continue to enhance the portal by adding new services and features.

For most elderly Americans, Social Security continues to represent their largest source of retirement income. The online *Statement* is a valuable planning tool and is one of a suite of online services we offer as part of a *my Social Security* online account. The online *Statement* provides workers with estimates of benefits for their future retirement, disability, and survivors insurance. The online *Statement* emphasizes to the public that, in addition to Social Security benefits, they will need other savings and income, such as investments, pensions, or retirement accounts, to enjoy a comfortable retirement. The *Statement* also presents annual earnings reported for workers and encourages them to help keep their earnings record accurate by periodically reviewing this information and reporting any discrepancies. Accurate earnings records are critical, because we use an individual’s earnings to determine future benefit amounts.

As of the second quarter of fiscal year (FY) 2014, we have already registered over 10 million *my Social Security* accounts. In line with our goal to provide quality online services, we plan to increase registration for *my Social Security*. In FY 2013, we registered about 6.2 million accounts, and registered users accessed the online *Statement* nearly 17 million times. Our goal in FY 2014 is to add 7.2 million accounts and add 8.3 million accounts in FY 2015.

Our Plan to Promote Online Statements

To significantly increase the number of people registering for *my Social Security* each year, we are developing an aggressive, multi-faceted promotional strategy to attract customers to our online service. Expanded online options give the public greater convenience and choice. The more people who use our online services, such as *my Social Security*, the more our field office employees can help people whose business with us is more complex and better suited to in-person, face-to-face service.

To increase the number of *my Social Security* registrants and online access to *Social Security Statements*, we plan to:

- Send an annual email reminder to individuals who already have a *my Social Security* account to review their *Statements*.
- Educate visitors to our field offices about our online services, including the online *Statement* and help them register for *my Social Security*.
- Provide webinars and other outreach tools to the advocacy community who help us share information about our online services and the importance of reviewing the *Statement* with their constituencies.
- Use social media (Twitter, Facebook) to promote *my Social Security*.
- Conduct a national *my Social Security* marketing campaign incorporating a variety of communication platforms, including online display ads, Facebook ads, public service billboards, and third party promotional materials.
- Promote the online *Statement* through targeted email blasts and through letters we mail to beneficiaries.
- Promote the online *Statement* through banners and prominent advertising throughout our agency website, which has more than 140 million visitors each year.
- Explore use of direct mail, possibly postcards to workers who will not receive mailed *Statements*. The postcard mailings will encourage workers to sign-up for *my Social Security* and obtain their *Statements* online. We will assess the outcome of this approach to determine if we should expand the use of direct mailing of postcard reminders to additional workers.

Our Plan to Resume Mailed Statements

In FY 2014, we will resume mailing *Statements* to some workers. Our plan to resume mailing *Statements* in FY 2014 includes these provisions:

- Starting in September 2014, we will mail the *Statement* to workers attaining ages 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, and 60 and over who are not receiving Social Security benefits and who are not registered for *my Social Security*. Based on actuarial population projections, we estimate the following volumes and costs:
 - For FY 2014 (September only), about 3.6 million *Statements* at a cost of \$1.8 million; and
 - For FY 2015 (full year of mailings), about 43.5 million *Statements* at a cost of roughly \$21.75 million.
- We will continue to print on-request *Statements*, as well as agency-initiated *Statements* going to foreign addresses.
- We plan to resume English and Spanish mailings.
- We plan to resume including an insert in our *Statements* for people ages 55 and older. This insert gives those approaching retirement age important information on the various factors they should consider as they decide when to receive Social Security retirement benefits. The insert also gives information about how to apply online for benefits when they are ready.
- We plan to resume including an insert in our *Statements* for people ages 25 and 30. This insert gives younger workers information about the importance of using the *Statement* in financial planning and about valuable safeguards Social Security provides in addition to retirement (e.g., disability and survivors benefits).

Conclusion

We remain fully committed to providing the superior level of service the public deserves and the service alternatives the public expects. We will continue to look to Congress to provide us with adequate, sustained, and predictable funding to meet these objectives.

Ensuring workers have access to the *Statement* continues to be an important part of our mission. We also value and recognize the need to continue to find the most efficient and cost-effective ways for the public to access our services, including obtaining their *Statement* online.