

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3313

November 19, 2021

Dr. Kilolo Kijakazi
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore MD, 21207

Everett Kelley
President, American Federation
of Government Employees
80 F Street NW
Washington DC, 20001

Dear Dr. Kijakazi and Mr. Kelley,

I write to you following up on the disappointing response Dr. Kijakazi provided to me and my colleagues on November 2. In that letter we called on the Social Security Administration (SSA) to resume normal in-person operations. Thus far SSA has failed to do so.

Dr. Kijakazi indicated one barrier to reopening is negotiating with the American Federation of Government Employees, and that conversations are ongoing. Meanwhile, my constituents and citizens across the country are waiting to have their casework issues resolved. While I recognize the Social Security Administration must follow certain union requirements, those commitments are not an excuse to sideline my constituents' needs. Vaccines are widely available and the rest of the country is emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is time to fully reopen all SSA field offices.

The continued closure of SSA field offices is leaving my constituents behind. One constituent suffered a stroke in December 2019 and cannot communicate clearly in a virtual space. He had a hearing scheduled for June 2020 but it was delayed indefinitely. After 15 months he finally settled for a video hearing, and his benefits were approved 23 months after his stroke. He has still not received his benefits and is facing dire financial problems. Another failure in your agency has been the major delays that held up one of my constituent's appeal hearing over five months because you could not accommodate an in-person meeting to help him. Another constituent had to surrender her driver's license to your agency via the mail to get a new Social Security Card with her married name on it. SSA took more than a month to process the card and return the license, making it impossible for her to drive legally in the interim. In other cases, constituents are offered a faster resolution if they waive their right to review their case file, which can deprive them of other rights later on. As you can see, many of these cases can be resolved by a simple in-person visit to a SSA field office. Instead, my constituents must suffer through a bureaucratic purgatory for the convenience of SSA's union employees. We must not forget that SSA employees are public servants first and union members second.

Much of the federal government has returned to in person work, and there is no reason why SAA should not follow suit. Without the help of your field agents in face-to-face appointments, my constituents are left uncertain about the resolution of their problems, many of which have been unduly exacerbated by your refusal to reopen.

I urge you both to do the right thing by fully reopening your field offices. I look forward to you both providing a swift and urgent response that this matter deserves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ted Budd', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ted Budd
Member of Congress