

Social Security Claims Processing Improvement Act

H.R. 8546 – Section-By-Section Summary

Section 1. Short Title.

Section 1 establishes this bill as the “Social Security Claims Processing Improvement Act of 2024.”

Section 2. Findings.

Section 2 establishes that half of the calls to the Social Security Administration (SSA) field offices and the national 1-800 number went unanswered; that Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security make up 90 percent or more of total income for the majority of beneficiaries; that benefits are interrupted following the initiation of a review which can take anywhere from 14 to 22 months to complete; and that the number of beneficiaries increased by more than 22 percent while SSA’s operating budget fell by more than 17 percent over the same period.

Section 3. Social Security Administration Claims Processing Review.

Section 3 requires the SSA Commissioner to conduct an annual review to identify processing error trends, possible improvements to the claims review process, the most common causes of overpayment, and the most common reasons for a denied application. The Commissioner would also be required to evaluate any instructions or training provided to benefits counselors, any regulations related to the determination of eligibility for covered benefits, and whether updates to such guidance are necessary to provide claims processors with better resources.

Section 4. Trainings and Workshops for Claims Processors.

Section 4 establishes an annual training program for claims processors who review claims for covered benefits, including appeals of continuing disability reviews. The training will include lessons on quality assurance standards, disability etiquette, and methods to improve internal communication to prevent overpayments and subsequent benefit denials. Any current training programs would be examined and revised. The bill also requires frequent workshops for claim processor to collaborate on reviews of complex cases.

Section 5. Reports.

Section 5 requires the SSA Commissioner to submit an annual report to Congress on the status of agency case backlogs, standards for continuing disability review determinations, and information on wait times for such determinations. The bill also requires a separate report on accessibility to ensure that all services at the SSA, including appeals of covered benefit denials, are in a format that is appropriate for the specific needs of individuals with disabilities, such as audio versions of notifications, and large print and braille options.

Section 6. Quality Assurance Standards.

Section 6 requires the Commissioner to establish quality assurance standards that instruct how staff at field offices assist claimants. This would include guidelines on how to answer questions of claimants in a timely and polite manner, and a process for a claimant to submit feedback to SSA on whether the claims processor who processed the application of such claimant met such standards.

Section 7. Definitions.**Section 8. Social Security Act Amendments.**

Section 8 amends the Social Security Act to ensure that all decisions to terminate Disability Insurance are reviewed by an additional claims processor. This section also includes a series of requirement related to the modernization of information submissions, to ensure that both email and fax may be used to submit any information to SSA field offices. Finally, this section expands the SSI Wage Reporting App to include wage reporting for beneficiaries receiving Disability Insurance.