

**SSA GENERAL COMMITTEE**  
**AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO**

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*Representing over 50,000 SSA employees across the nation, Puerto Rico and Pacific Islands*

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July 2, 2009

Brothers and Sisters:

The American Federation of Government Employees represents more than 50,000 workers across the country in the Social Security Administration. Since the current SSA Commissioner, Michael Astrue, has been in office, our members have suffered under his incompetent management. And it's not just our members who have suffered.

Since 1942, the Social Security Administration has been the touchstone for Americans in times of personal transition—retirement, disability or death. The employees of SSA have spent hours providing benefits, expertise and compassion to individuals when they need it most. SSA employees have always taken great pride in providing “the right benefit to the right person at the right time”. The public has come to expect world class service from SSA and its employees are ready, willing and able to provide just that.

Now a crisis in leadership threatens to take away the safety net hard working Americans and their families have depended upon for over 50 years. This crisis also threatens to take away what matters to SSA employees the most—the ability to do their job in a competent and professional manner. During the Bush Administration, SSA Commissioner, Michael Astrue submitted inadequate budget requests. SSA finds itself with its lowest staffing level in years and unprecedented workloads. Michael Astrue has sought to manage the “silver tsunami” of retiring “baby boomers” with innovative and creative solutions. However, the SSA’s technological capability has not kept up with its innovation. When Commissioner Astrue made the decision to emphasize internet claims, it robbed the American public of the world class service they expect and deserve.

SSA’s I-claims system (internet claims process) does not ensure that beneficiaries are paid correctly. The system does not provide adequate information to online applicants that allow them to make the most advantageous choice possible. If a beneficiary does not make the most advantageous choice for their personal situation, they could lose out on benefits. In addition, the application does not clearly instruct a beneficiary on what information should be provided. If an applicant does not provide relevant information, they may either lose benefits or become overpaid.

Commissioner Astrue’s response to these issues exacerbated the problem. He authorized and issued a directive that **prohibits** SSA employees from providing information to an online applicant that may result in a more advantageous choice or

correct response on their internet application. Right now, SSA employees review every Internet claim. Up until recently, an SSA employee would contact an online applicant if the employee found a disadvantageous choice or an incorrect response. The SSA employee would then discuss the response with the applicant and correct or amend the answer if needed. **Now, however, SSA employees are specifically prohibited from doing that.** If an SSA employee finds an incorrect or disadvantageous answer, they are required to leave the answer “as is” or risk being insubordinate. This means SSA, as an agency, is knowingly paying incorrect or disadvantageous benefits and doing nothing to prevent this problem. This is wrong and contrary to everything SSA has stood for in American history.

If this wasn't bad enough, Commissioner Astrue is engaging in an aggressive public relations campaign to push beneficiaries into filing for benefits on the Internet. SSA has instructed employees to insist applicants file on the Internet even if they want a face to face interview with an SSA employee. SSA employees are being told to advise applicants who do not have a computers or Internet service to file online through public Internet providers and at Internet cafes, places known to be frequented by identity thieves. SSA has instructed employees not to discuss the most advantageous month for an applicant to apply for benefits. In short, Commissioner Astrue is requiring employees to take action they know hurts the public. He has abandoned the public and the Agency he serves.

Recently, our AFGE Social Security General Committee, Councils and Local leadership gathered to discuss how we could remedy the crisis at Social Security and we came up with a solution: **we need a new Social Security Commissioner** – one who will get us the administrative funding we need; one who will respect our members; one who will act in the best interest of the American public; and one who believes in the mission of the agency. After discussing the possible alternatives, we unanimously voted no confidence in Michael Astrue in his role as the commissioner of the Social Security Administration.

As you know, the AFL-CIO Executive Council also passed a resolution in support of our members, by urging “immediate presidential action to remove Michael J. Astrue as commissioner of the Social Security Administration.”

We are asking our union brothers and sisters in every AFL-CIO State Labor Federation and CLC for further support:

- 1) Please support and sign the attached resolution. You may fax your signed copy to Dana Duggins, AFGE Council 220 at **530-246-5015**. A list of all signatories will be posted to the AFGE websites.
- 2) We invite you to send a letter to President Obama, asking for Michael Astrue to be sent on his way so that our agency can once again be the pride of the American government.

For additional information and review, please go to [www.preserveyoursocialsecurity.com](http://www.preserveyoursocialsecurity.com). This website provides many documents, including a synopsis of Michael Astrue's missteps which lay out the reasons for our unanimous vote.

We need your support in our fight to keep our agency as the bedrock of American retirement security. I urge you to consider sending a letter to President Obama with your concerns over Astrue's malfeasance. Together, we can make a change. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

In Solidarity,

Witold Skwierczynski, President  
AFGE Council 220, SSA

**RESOLUTION TO REMOVE MICHAEL J. ASTRUE  
AS COMMISSIONER OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION**

WHEREAS Social Security Administration Commissioner Michael J. Astrue has refused to work with the exclusive representatives (AFGE, ALJ/IFPTE) of the employees towards effecting the mission of the Agency to provide outstanding service to the American public; and

WHEREAS Commissioner Astrue has implemented policies and procedure changes without sufficient testing and employee input, thus placing the public at risk of being disadvantaged in their benefit choices; and

WHEREAS Commissioner Astrue has disadvantaged unrepresented claimants in disability hearings by not providing sufficient staff to explain new electronic processes, such as the electronic disability file; and

WHEREAS trained SSA workers are now being instructed not to question an applicant's choice of when to start benefit payments, even when the choice may be disadvantageous to the applicant; and

WHEREAS SSA employees are now being instructed in some sites to direct applicants to file for benefits on the Internet, even though the applicants have come into a field office to be interviewed by an SSA employee; and

WHEREAS, on March 3, 2009, the AFL-CIO Executive Board urged immediate Presidential action to remove Michael J. Astrue as Commissioner of the Social Security Administration for his neglect of duty in administering the Social Security Administration and its programs, and for his hostility towards SSA's unions;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this body will stand with the AFL-CIO, with the American Federation of Government Employees, and with the Association of Administrative Law Judges/International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers in calling upon the President and the Congress to remove Michael J. Astrue as Commissioner of the Social Security Administration for his neglect of his duty to carry out the mission of Social Security as mandated by law and by Congressional intent.

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Signature

Date

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**State and Title of Affiliate Organization**