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July 13, 2011

The Honorable Michael J. Astrue
Commissioner
Social Security Administration
International Trade Commission Building
500 E Street, SW
Washington DC 20254

Dear Commissioner Astrue:

Thank you for your service as Commissioner of Social Security. Under your leadership, the Social Security Administration (SSA) has consistently kept administrative costs under 1% of revenues. Such remarkable efficiency underscores the success of a program that is both well-designed and well-managed. However, I write today with deep concern about your decision to suspend issuance of Social Security Statements. As a representative of Florida's 19th Congressional district, home to almost 200,000 Social Security beneficiaries, I represent a constituency greatly affected by even the slightest changes to the program.

As you know, SSA began mailing annual earnings statements to all American workers in 1999, as required by law. In addition to assisting with retirement planning and helping to identify wage-related errors, annual earnings statements build support and understanding for Social Security. According to the bi-partisan Social Security Advisory Board, "SSA's public survey data has shown a link between increasing public confidence and receipt of a statement. People who receive a statement not only experience higher knowledge of Social Security than non-recipients, but also exhibit...greater confidence that the program still will be there for them when they need it."

Americans support Social Security and do not mind paying into the system. They know that Social Security supports retirees, surviving widows, children, and the disabled, but they also know that they will benefit as well. The annual statement is typically the only link between most Americans and Social Security until they begin receiving benefits. An annual reminder has the added benefit of counteracting politicians' misleading claims that Social Security will not be there when individuals need it.

Online statements simply will not replace a mailed copy. Many of my constituents do not have access to computers, and many lack the proficiency to navigate the website and retrieve their statement online. They should not have to. Last year, SSA sent out 152 million earnings statements at a cost of roughly \$70 million, or about 46 cents per statement. A \$70 million expenditure may seem like an attractive target during the nation's budget struggles, but any

savings that arise from suspending these statements program may be offset by the administrative costs of stopping and restarting a program. In fact, maintaining a service during times of budget uncertainty can often prove less costly.

I feel that the usefulness of these statements significantly outweighs the relatively minute cost. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to reconsider your decision and resume the mailing of annual earnings statements.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ted Deutch", with a stylized, flowing script.

Ted Deutch
MEMBER OF CONGRESS