

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 13, 2025

Leland Dudek
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Acting Commissioner Dudek,

We write with alarm regarding ongoing issues with the Social Security Administration (SSA)'s website and the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)'s plans to worsen this situation by firing up to 50 percent of employees in the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)—the department responsible for protecting Americans' most sensitive information, maintaining the agency's benefit claims processing systems, and managing the SSA's website and the online portal benefits recipients rely on.¹ We are concerned these cuts will lead to further website and benefit disruptions, preventing tens of millions of Americans from accessing their hard-earned Social Security and Supplemental Security Income benefits.

Under your watch, SSA has initiated a series of severe staffing cuts to critical departments, impeding beneficiaries' ability to seek customer service and access their account information. On February 28, 2025, you announced plans to reduce SSA's workforce by over 12 percent.² Seventy-eight percent of SSA employees who have already been fired worked in field offices directly serving SSA recipients.³ Of the remaining employees SSA is expected to cut, hundreds will come from OCIO—which has been directed to reduce its staff by 50 percent.⁴ Given ongoing issues with SSA's websites and online portals, these cuts are particularly troubling because OCIO oversees SSA's internal computer systems, including the operation of SSA.gov.⁵

The cuts to OCIO are intentional—and dangerous. On March 27, President Trump signed an executive order that ends collective bargaining rights for many federal workers, making it easier

¹ CNN, "Social Security targets tech team for cuts at a time when systems are under strain," Tami Luhby, April 4, 2024, https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/04/politics/social-security-tech-team-layoffs/index.html?cid=ios_app.

² Social Security Matters, "Social Security Announces Workforce and Organization Plans," February 28, 2025, <https://blog.ssa.gov/social-security-announces-workforce-and-organization-plans/>.

³ Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren, "Senate Republicans Vote NO on Protecting Americans' Social Security," press release, April 5, 2025, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/news/press-releases/senate-republicans-vote-no-on-protecting-americans-social-security>.

⁴ CNN, "Social Security targets tech team for cuts at a time when systems are under strain," Tami Luhby, April 4, 2024, https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/04/politics/social-security-tech-team-layoffs/index.html?cid=ios_app.

⁵ Washington Post, "Social Security website keeps crashing, as DOGE demands cuts to IT staff," Lisa Rein, Hannah Nathanson, Elizabeth Dwoskin, April 7, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/04/07/social-security-website-crashes-musk-trump/>.

to fire them or shift their duties.⁶ The order takes aim at unions who have “declared war on President Trump’s agenda,”⁷ like the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), which represents OCIO staff. The Administration’s move to strip these employees of their bargaining rights is making it easier for DOGE to fire OCIO staff and replace them with employees who are “more amenable to doing what [DOGE] want[s] to do.”⁸ But these actions are dangerous for SSA—OCIO employees are the ones who know SSA’s programming language and can “keep[] the technology operating and addressing things that go wrong.”⁹ This technology includes the administration and oversight of the agency’s anti-fraud software, which DOGE has been tampering with.¹⁰ This would not be the first time DOGE has cut an agency at its knees, leaving customers scrambling, and then re-hiring fired employees. In March, DOGE re-hired 50 fired technology Department of Education employees who had critical institutional knowledge.¹¹ Cutting OCIO in half runs the risk of repeating DOGE’s previous mistakes.

Since you took over SSA, the agency has failed to maintain its online infrastructure. While you have been directing SSA beneficiaries to file for benefits online, SSA.gov has “crashed repeatedly...with outages lasting anywhere from 20 minutes to almost a day.”¹² Last week, we wrote a letter to you asking for details as to why our constituents faced a variety of account issues during one of these outages on March 31st, including receiving messages that they were “not receiving payments” and the disappearance of their account histories, but you have yet to respond. It is unsurprising that weeks after you allowed DOGE to invade SSA, improperly access SSA data, and announce closures of Social Security offices,¹³ our constituents began having problems accessing their benefits. In addition, SSA field offices are facing more frequent technology glitches, preventing workers from providing customer service to beneficiaries who need help.¹⁴ We are concerned that these recurring issues will impact the benefits of our constituents—many of whom rely on Social Security to pay rent or put food on the table.

These disastrous cuts also expose SSA to systems vulnerabilities and risk Americans’ data to hackers and foreign agents seeking to obtain Americans’ private information. In addition to the

⁶ Executive Order 14251, March 27, 2025, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/03/2025-05836/exclusions-from-federal-labor-management-relations-programs>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ CNN, “Social Security targets tech team for cuts at a time when systems are under strain,” Tami Luhby, April 4, 2024, https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/04/politics/social-security-tech-team-layoffs/index.html?cid=ios_app.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Washington Post, “Social Security website keeps crashing, as DOGE demands cuts to IT staff,” Lisa Rein, Hannah Nathanson, Elizabeth Dwoskin, April 7, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/04/07/social-security-website-crashes-musk-trump/>.

¹¹ Inside Higher Ed, “Education Department Reeling After Layoffs,” Liam Knox, March 25, 2025, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2025/03/25/education-department-staff-struggle-after-mass>.

¹² Washington Post, “Social Security to require millions to make claims in person rather than by phone,” Lisa Rein and Justine McDaniel, March 18, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/03/18/social-security-musk-trump-doge/>.

¹³ Letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren to Acting Social Security Commissioner Leland Dudek, April 7, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/warren_letter_to_dudek_re_ssi.pdf.

¹⁴ CNN, “Social Security targets tech team for cuts at a time when systems are under strain,” Tami Luhby, April 4, 2024, https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/04/politics/social-security-tech-team-layoffs/index.html?cid=ios_app.

dozens of senior SSA officials with centuries' worth of experience who have resigned or retired, SSA's entire cybersecurity leadership was also part of the exodus.¹⁵ Leaving Americans' most sensitive information unguarded places immeasurable financial and economic harm on our most vulnerable.

Before your announced cuts, SSA was already "at a 50-year staffing low" while "serving the highest number of beneficiaries...in the history of the agency."¹⁶ The Trump Administration's cuts will put further strain on SSA, making it more difficult for this agency to deliver well-deserved benefits to hard-working Americans. We ask that you immediately cease all OCIO firings and act swiftly to restore SSA system and website functionality to prevent any further disruption of Social Security beneficiaries' access to their account information and benefits. In addition to answering the questions in our April 7, 2025 letter, we request that you provide the following information by April 27, 2025:

1. How many employees from OCIO have left SSA since January 20, 2025, either voluntarily or involuntarily?
2. How many additional employees from OCIO are you planning to fire?
3. What analysis led you to cut 50 percent of OCIO staff? Please provide that analysis.
4. Why was OCIO in a different bargaining unit than other SSA employees?
5. SSA's beneficiary portal, "my Social Security," was down for several hours last week.¹⁷ How do you plan to maintain SSA's beneficiary-facing portal when the division tasked with overseeing the portal is being cut in half?
6. How will firing, reassigning, or pressuring half of the OCIO employees to retire or resign help improve the internal and external technology issues that SSA has faced since DOGE's invasion of the agency?
7. Do you plan to hire federal contractors to perform OCIO's functions? If so, which functions?
8. What role is DOGE playing in terminations across SSA?
9. What role is DOGE playing in terminations, reassignments, or separation incentives in OCIO?

¹⁵ On file with the Senate Committee on Finance.


¹⁶ CNN, "Social Security Administration aims to cut about 7,000 jobs, prompting fears of customer service impact," Tami Luhby, February 28, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/28/politics/social-security-job-cuts-doge/index.html>.

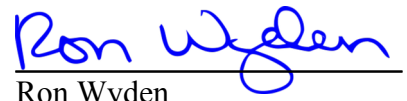
¹⁷ CNN, "Social Security targets tech team for cuts at a time when systems are under strain," Tami Luhby, April 4, 2024, https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/04/politics/social-security-tech-team-layoffs/index.html?cid=ios_app.


10. How do you plan to ensure no technological knowledge of internal systems are lost during the planned reduction in force?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Ron Wyden
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Finance


Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator