

The Disability Insider

News from the Genex Social
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New Acting SSA Commissioner

On Friday, July 9, 2021, President Joe Biden fired SSA commissioner Andrew Saul after the Commissioner refused to resign. While former Commissioner Saul's term was not set to expire until January 2025, a White House official accused Saul of taking action during his tenure that "undermined and politicized Social Security disability benefits," hurt relationships with federal employee unions and ran "contrary to the mission of the agency and the President's policy agenda." President Biden appointed Dr. Kilolo Kijakazi, Deputy Commissioner for Retirement and Disability Policy at SSA, as acting commissioner until the search for a permanent commissioner and deputy commissioner can be completed. "During her time as Deputy Commissioner, Dr. Kijakazi advised the Commissioner on policy issues and was responsible for planning and managing the development of program policy, policy research and evaluation, and statistical programs to inform programs administered by SSA. These programs include Retirement and Survivors Insurance, Disability Insurance, and Supplemental Security Income." Dr. Kijakazi holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the State University of New York, Binghamton, a Master of Social Work degree from Howard University, and a PhD in public policy from the George Washington University.

[Further information can be found here.](#)



SSA Board of Trustees Trust Fund Update

On August 31, 2021 the Social Security Board of Trustees released its annual report on the long-term financial status of the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Disability Insurance (OASI and DI) Trust Funds. “The combined asset reserves of the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Disability Insurance (OASI and DI) Trust Funds are projected to become depleted in 2034, one year earlier than projected last year, with 78 percent of benefits payable at that time. The OASI Trust Fund is projected to become depleted in 2033, one year sooner than last year’s estimate, with 76 percent of benefits payable at that time. The DI Trust Fund is estimated to become depleted in 2057, eight years earlier than last year’s estimate, with 91 percent of benefits still payable.”

In the 2021 Annual Report to Congress, the Trustees announced:

- The asset reserves of the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds increased by \$11 billion in 2020 to a total of \$2.908 trillion.
- The total annual cost of the program is projected to exceed total annual income, for the first time since 1982, in 2021 and remain higher throughout the 75-year projection period. As a result, asset reserves are expected to decline during 2021. Social Security’s cost has exceeded its non-interest income since 2010.
- The year when the combined trust fund reserves are projected to become depleted, if Congress does not act before then, is 2034 – one year earlier than last year’s projection.

At that time, there would be sufficient income coming in to pay 78 percent of scheduled benefits.

Other highlights of the Trustees Report include:

- Total income, including interest, to the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds amounted to \$1.118 trillion in 2020. (\$1.001 trillion from net payroll tax contributions, \$41 billion from taxation of benefits, and \$76 billion in interest)
- Total expenditures from the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds amounted to \$1.107 trillion in 2020.
- Social Security paid benefits of \$1.096 trillion in calendar year 2020. There were about 65 million beneficiaries at the end of the calendar year.
- The projected actuarial deficit over the 75-year long-range period is 3.54 percent of taxable payroll – higher than the 3.21 percent projected in last year’s report.
- During 2020, an estimated 175 million people had earnings covered by Social Security and paid payroll taxes.
- The cost of \$6.3 billion to administer the Social Security program in 2020 was a very low 0.6 percent of total expenditures.
- The combined Trust Fund asset reserves earned interest at an effective annual rate of 2.6 percent in 2020.

[Further information can be found here.](#)

Updated Compassionate Allowance List

Kilolo Kijakazi, Acting Commissioner of Social Security, announced 8/16/21 that SSA is expanding the list of compassionate allowances to add twelve conditions. Charlevoix Saguenay Spastic Ataxia (ARSACS), Choroid Plexus Carcinoma, CIC-rearranged Sarcoma, Congenital Zika Syndrome, Desmoplastic Mesothelioma, Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy – Adult, Pericardial Mesothelioma, Refractory Hodgkin Lymphoma, Renpenning Syndrome, SCN8A Related Epilepsy with Encephalopathy, SYNGAP1-related NSID, and Taybi-Linder Syndrome will now be considered for compassionate allowances, which quickly identify “severe medical conditions and diseases that meet Social Security’s standards for disability benefits.”

The list of compassionate allowances was started by former SSA commissioner Michael Astrue in 2007 to deal with a backlog in cases, now contains a total of 254 conditions. To date more than 700,00 claimants have been approved via this accelerated process.

[Further information about the expansion can be found here.](#) [The complete list of conditions can be found here.](#)



Proposed Rule on Frequency of CDR's Being Withdrawn

On July 28, 2021, the Social Security Administration posted to the federal register that it was withdrawing a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking posted by the previous Commissioner, that would have made continuing disability reviews more frequent for some recipients of disability benefits. “After considering the submitted comments and further feedback provided in the listening sessions, we are withdrawing the proposed rule, Rules Regarding the Frequency and Notice of Continuing Disability Reviews (84 FR 63588, November 18, 2019) (RIN 0960–A127). We noted our intent to withdraw the proposed rule in our Spring 2021 Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions.”

[Further information can be found here.](#)

Genex Staff Spotlight

Kevin Ufier National Director, Disability & Absence Services



Kevin Ufier is National Director of Managed Disability at Genex Services, Wayne, PA, where he works with long-term disability carriers, TPAs and employers in developing return-to-work and stay-at-home programs for people with disabilities. Mr. Ufier has more than 30 years' experience in vocational rehabilitation with early intervention program expertise in short- and long-term disability insurance.

Previously, Mr. Ufier served as a vocational specialist, providing expert vocational testimony in litigation cases and working closely with people with disabilities, medical, legal and employment personnel. He later moved to John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co. as a disability consultant and national group disability manager, responsible for group disability operations.

Since 1995, Mr. Ufier has held management positions at Genex, all related to the development, oversight and management of disability services for its customer base. Mr. Ufier holds a master's degree in counselor education and is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor.

Kevin has testified before the U.S. Congress subcommittee concerning SSDB on RTW services. He also heads Genex's newly launched Employment Network for SSA's Ticket to Work program. [Further information about Genex's Employment Network can be found here.](#)