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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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HEALTH
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

September 10, 2020

The Honorable Andrew Saul
Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Blvd.
Woodlawn, MD 21207

Dear Commissioner Saul,

I write today to urge you to double down on reducing the backlog of Social Security disability cases in New York City and to urge you to open a Social Security Hearing Office on Staten Island and in Brooklyn. I'm proud to have helped lead the push in the House to provide significantly more funding to the Social Security Administration (SSA) so you would have the personnel and technology upgrades you need to make real gains in clearing the backlog of Social Security disability cases. Now, thanks to the \$390 million in dedicated funding that Congress allocated and the President signed into law, we've made real progress together but more needs to be done to ensure that my ill constituents get their earned disability benefits in a timely manner.

As you know, as neither Staten Island nor Brooklyn has a Social Security Hearing Office, my constituents were assigned to one of the four New York City Hearing Offices – either the one in the Bronx, or Queens or one of the two in Manhattan. My constituents suffered for years with extremely long wait times at these Hearing Offices. In Fiscal Year 2018, out of 170 SSA Hearing Offices nationwide, one of the Manhattan offices was the 3rd worst in the nation with a wait time of two years and two months, while the Queens office was the 10th worst with a wait time of two years and the Bronx office was the 16th worst with a wait time of just under two years. This was completely unacceptable for my sick or injured constituents who are battling serious health issues.

We have now made real progress together thanks to the funding infusion to SSA. The national average for backlogged SSA cases is now 11 months and all four of the New York offices are better than the national average with cases being finalized in an average of eight months in the Bronx Office and in ten months in the Queens and Manhattan Offices. While I'm proud we've worked together to significantly reduce the case backlog, eight to ten months is still too long for my constituents to wait to have their cases decided.

While Staten Island and Brooklyn do have Social Security Field Offices where a senior can receive assistance with their Social Security benefits, there is not a single Social Security Hearing Office in either borough that makes up my district despite Brooklyn having the largest population of any of the five boroughs. This is patently unfair when the Bronx and Queens each have a Hearing Office and

Manhattan has two offices. Further, this would certainly improve your operating budget, as you would be able to find lower-priced leases in Staten Island and Brooklyn as opposed to either of the Manhattan locations as one is at the intersection of the Lower West Village and SoHo and one is between the Financial District and Tribeca. These are savings you can put into hiring more staff and upgrading systems to assist in reducing the backlog further. Forcing my constituents to travel hours to Manhattan, the Bronx or Queens creates barriers with childcare, transportation, and accessibility issues. They should be able to have their case heard in their own community.

I urge you to work with my office during this pandemic when Hearing Offices are closed to the public to make preparations to open a Hearing Office in both Brooklyn and Staten Island as well as to focus even more attention and resources to reducing the case backlog further. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'max', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Max Rose
Member of Congress