

# The Disability Insider

News from the Genex Social  
Security Disability Division

Spring 2023

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## SSAB Report on DDS Agencies

In April of 2023 the Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB) released a report titled, Social Security and State Disability Determination Services Agencies: A Partnership in Need of Attention. The report "outlines the SSA/DDS partnership's history, evolution, and management. It also articulates that the structure of the relationship has remained static for decades even as technology, program integrity, and other requirements have changed. Lastly, it offers examples of how SSA's management approach helps and hinders the relationship and the disability determination process more broadly in both policy and procedure." The report found "key performance metrics indicate that DDSs are struggling to keep up in the current environment. The Board is encouraged by Congressional interest in these challenges. Still, the Board believes long-standing frictions between SSA, state governments, and the DDSs call for ongoing review of how SSA and the DDSs work together and how the agency incorporates DDS needs into its overall strategic, performance, workforce, and contingency plans." These challenges have led to an overall increase in initial level processing times from 133 days pre-pandemic to the current timeframe of 222 days.

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



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# President Biden Releases Proposed Budget

On March 9, 2023, the Biden administration released its fiscal year 2024 budget proposals to Congress. "Our FY 2024 budget request is \$15.5 billion, a nearly \$1.4 billion or 10 percent increase from the FY 2023 enacted level. This increase is necessary to improve services at our field offices, State DDSs, and teleservice centers for retirees, people with disabilities, and their families. The Budget also assists people facing barriers in accessing our services through expanding online tools and improving National 800 Number service, and by adding staff to reduce the wait for a disability decision."

The proposed increase of \$1.4 billion would be about twice the increase between FY 2022 and FY 2023 (\$785 million). The Budget includes:

- An increase of \$250 million to maintain staffing levels for field offices nationwide to better serve the public.
- \$60 million for teleservice centers to reduce wait times by over 40 percent and substantially reduce busy rates from 15 percent to 3 percent.
- \$75 million for payment centers to handle more work.
- \$100 million for hearing offices to eliminate the backlog of disability hearings, decreasing average wait times by one year, from a high of 633 days in September 2017 to 270 days by September 2024.
- \$2.9 billion supports payroll, hiring, workload processing costs, and other expenses for the State DDSs. This amount is an increase of over \$350 million from our FY 2023 enacted level and funds additional staff and pay increases needed to help with recruitment and retention. To address the large backlog of initial disability claims and the additional claims expected to be received in FY 2024, the Budget expands processing capacity by increasing staffing at the DDS offices. As a result, they expect the DDSs to process over 400,000 more initial disability claims and over 200,000 more reconsiderations than in FY 2023.
- \$250 million increase from FY 2023 enacted level, to help maintain and modernize large IT infrastructure and increase the suite of digital and automated services.
- \$86 million above the 2023 enacted level, for dedicated PI work to provide effective stewardship of taxpayer dollars to protect Social Security, so current and future eligible beneficiaries receive the benefits they deserve.

This is a proposed budget and still must go through the Congressional appropriations process.

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

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# SSA Trustees Report Released

On March 31, 2023, The Social Security Board of Trustees released its annual report on the financial status of the Social Security 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, which is one year earlier than projected last year, with 80 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 77 percent of benefits payable at that time. The Disability Insurance (DI) Trust Fund is projected to be able to pay 100 percent of total scheduled benefits through at least 2097, the last year of this report's projection period. By comparison, last year's report projected that the DI Trust Fund would be able to pay scheduled benefits through at least 2096, the last year of that report's projection period.

In the 2022 Annual Report to Congress, the Trustees announced:

- The asset reserves of the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds decreased by \$22 billion in 2022 to a total of \$2.830 trillion.
- Under the Trustees' immediate assumptions, the total annual cost of the program is projected to exceed total annual income, for the third consecutive year.

Other highlights of the Trustees Report include:

- Total income, including interest, to the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds amounted to \$1.222 trillion in 2022.
- Total expenditures from the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds amounted to \$1.244 trillion in 2022.
- Social Security paid benefits of \$1.232 trillion in calendar year 2022. There were about 66 million beneficiaries at the end of the calendar year.
- The projected actuarial deficit over the 75-year long-range period is 3.61 percent of taxable payroll – up from 3.42 percent in last year's report.
- During 2022, an estimated 180.5 million people had earnings covered by Social Security and paid payroll taxes.
- The cost of \$6.5 billion to administer the Social Security program in 2022 was a very low 0.4 percent of total expenditures – down from 0.6 percent in 2021.

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

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## Video Consultative Exams Will Continue on a Limited Basis

On April 4, 2023, Social Security published an emergency message (EM-23027) to provide policy and procedures for telehealth consultative examinations (THCE) conducted after the final day of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, May 11, 2023.

"Before the COVID-19 national public health emergency, we limited the use of audio and video technology for CEs to psychiatric and psychological CEs that do not require standardized testing. These THCEs were permitted only in agency-provided locations with agency-provided audio-visual equipment and secure broadband connections (DI 22510.012)." During the COVID-19 national public health emergency, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) temporarily modified enforcement of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Rules in connection with the good faith provision of telehealth services using non-public facing audio or video communication products. Consistent with HHS's action, we quickly expanded authority to schedule THCEs using a wide variety of other technologies and with claimants attending the examinations from private locations of their choice (including private homes) to help facilitate timely disability decision-making. In December 2021, we expanded emergency THCE authority to include some speech and language examinations."

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

## SSA Proposes Rule Change to Omit Food from In-Kind Support Calculations

On February 15, 2023, the Social Security Administration published in the federal register a proposed rule change to remove food from the calculation of In-Kind Support and Maintenance (ISM) for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applicants and recipients.

"Accordingly, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applicants and recipients would no longer need to provide information about their food expenses for us to consider in our ISM calculations. We expect that these changes will simplify our rules, making them less cumbersome to administer and easier for the public to understand and follow. These simplifications would make it easier for SSI applicants and recipients to comply with our program requirements, which would save time for both them and us, and improve the equitable treatment of food assistance within the SSI program."

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

# Genex Staff Spotlight

## Serena Marinelli Claims Developer II

Serena began her Genex journey in March 2018 starting as an administrative assistant, then switching roles to medical record follow-up before joining the developer team in January 2019. Serena was promoted to Developer II in 2021 and finds great joy in handling complicated cases and performing detailed case reviews. Serena prides herself on her attention to detail, communication skills, and being a mentor and helping hand to her fellow colleagues. When not at work, Serena is an avid film buff, supporter of the industrial music community locally in-person and worldwide via Twitch, is dedicated to yoga and power lifting for fitness and well-being and enjoys attending local comic cons with her spouse and son in and around Philadelphia.



**For more information on Genex's disability management call or email today.**

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