Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 20, 2014

The Honorable Carolyn Colvin
Acting Commissioner, Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Acting Commissioner Colvin:

As you know, our Social Security system provides financial stability for individuals and families at retirement, the onset of a disability, or the loss of a spouse or parent. Social Security is also important in our constituents' daily lives, which is why we want to make sure field offices are available and accessible to meet their needs. At the same time those field offices must provide all necessary services, which is why we are concerned with the decision to discontinue in-person access to benefit verification statements and eliminate Numi-lites. We strongly urge you to reconsider and find solutions that protect the Americans who rely on you for help.

Last year, 11 million people used field offices to request copies of Social Security Numbers (Numi-lites) and/or benefit verification statements from SSA offices, where they can be printed out immediately. Beginning in August, with respect to Numi-lites, and October, with respect to benefit verification statements, these valuable services will be discontinued. Americans will no longer be able to walk into field offices to request these documents, but instead, will have to apply online or by phone for benefit verifications or apply for a Social Security card, adding 7 to 10 days to wait times. While SSA has indicated that an exception policy will address dire situations, we are concerned this will be burdensome to administer and that many people with urgent needs will be left out.

Middle class Americans have regular need for the benefit verification statement for tax purposes, car loans, mortgages, or rental agreements. Additionally, these forms are used in applying for low income benefits, housing, or workforce programs. And unemployed job seekers may need proof of their Social Security numbers quickly, without having to wait for a Social Security card to arrive in the mail, to make sure that they don't miss out on jobs when potential employers are moving quickly.

The SSA's plan to have people access their benefit verification statements over the phone or online, is likely to exacerbate access issues for the most vulnerable. The call centers are not equipped to handle the new demand. Callers in March experienced a 26 minute average wait

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time as compared to 9 minutes a year ago. The busy rate is up 20 percent over last year and staffing at the call centers is down to its lowest point since they were established. And this is before millions of new calls for the benefit verification form.

Transitioning to online forms will present a very difficult challenge particularly for the millions of Americans who lack computers, printers and computer expertise. Moreover, never before have Americans been required to use SSA's online services. This will mark a first, and it is not clear that the system is capable of handling this new volume of online usage.

We urge you to continue providing vital services through a robust network of SSA field offices. Limiting access to these forms without understanding the effects on Americans could result in unintended consequences for our constituents. We understand SSA has suffered budget cuts, however discontinuing these services is likely to increase rather than decrease cost at the expense of millions of beneficiaries who need, want and have paid for these services. While Numi-lites cost mere pennies to generate, the alternative -- a Social Security card -- will cost SSA about $25 to print, not including mailing costs. Until an affordable alternative is found, the failure to provide Numi-lites will cause delays and increased costs. SSA would also need to add a large number of call center staff to respond to the large increase in call volume, further increasing costs.

It is critical that the Social Security Administration reverse its decision to discontinue in-person access to benefit verification statements. We also want to work with you to find a solution to the over-reliance on Numi-lites and delays in being able to receive new or replacement Social Security cards.

We hope you will take seriously the concerns of the undersigned Members.

Sincerely,

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Member of Congress

Robert A. Brady
Member of Congress

Bruce Braley
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Corrine Brown
Member of Congress

Julia Brownley
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Cheri Bustos
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Michael E. Capuano
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Tony Cárdenas
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André Carson
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Matt Cartwright
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Judy Chu
Member of Congress

David Cicilline
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Katherine Clark
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Yvette Clarke
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Wm. Lacy Clay
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Emanuel Cleaver, II
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Gerald E. Connolly
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John Conyers
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Steve Cohen
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Jim Costa
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Joe Courtney
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Elijah E. Cummings
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Danny K. Davis
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Susan A. Davis
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Peter DeFazio
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Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress

Theodore E. Deutch
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Tammy Duckworth
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Donna F. Edwards
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Keith Ellison
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William L. Enyart
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Elizabeth Esty
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Chaka Fattah
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Sam Farr
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Gene Green
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Luis V. Gutiérrez
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Alcee L. Hastings
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Brian Higgins
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Rubén Hinojosa
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Rush Holt
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Michael M. Honda
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Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

Hakeem Jeffries
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Eddie Bernice Johnson
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Hank Johnson
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Marcy Kaptur
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William Keating
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Robin L. Kelly
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Derek Kilmer
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Grace Meng
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Gwen Moore
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Jim Moran
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Chris Van Hollen
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Tim Walz
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Maxine Waters
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Henry A. Waxman
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Frederica S. Wilson
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