Message from the Board

In 2016, the Board continued its mission to provide bipartisan advice on the Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs to the President, Congress, and the Commissioner of Social Security. The 2016 Annual Report of the Social Security Advisory Board provides an overview of this work. We thank Acting Commissioner Carolyn Colvin, Social Security Administration (SSA) employees, Congressional staff, and the many stakeholders and experts who met with us throughout the year for working with us.

The Board called for reexamination of the representative payee (rep payee) program in the Board’s annual SSI Statement (also an appendix to SSA’s annual report of the SSI program). The Board also addressed unique issues with rep payees in the SSI program in one of its major 2016 publications, a report on rep payees. In addition, the Board also commissioned both an independent report and an independent single issue Technical Panel made up of expert economists. The Labor Force Technical Panel was tasked with focusing on the complexity of the labor force projection methodology and its future trends in calculating solvency.

In Representative Payees: A Call to Action, the Board called on SSA and interested stakeholders to reexamine the entire rep payee program, including SSA’s procedures for determining the need for a rep payee, selecting a qualified rep payee, providing training to both SSA staff and the rep payee, and the oversight process. The Board’s SSI Statement also focused on rep payees and their role in managing benefits for SSI recipients. The Board found several shortcomings in SSA’s process for appointing rep payees, onerous requirements for rep payees, and inadequate monitoring. The report also introduced Supported Decision Making as an avenue toward helping people learn to manage their finances.

In SSAB’s commissioned report, Rethinking the Promoting Opportunity Demonstration Project, Dr. Michael Wiseman highlighted several weaknesses in the project’s design, including (1) work disincentives and inequities, (2) unnecessary replication of other demonstration projects already in progress, and (3) design features that will make it impossible to draw inferences about the project’s affects on individual behavior. Dr. Wiseman’s report recommended delaying or modifying the demonstration.

One of the Board’s major achievements in 2016 was the Public Forum on the SSI Program held on July 12. The forum brought together policymakers from Capitol Hill and federal and state agencies; the research and academic community; child, welfare, aging, and disability advocates; and other experts to discuss the SSI program. The forum featured panels on four topics related to SSI: (1) resource limits and the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, (2) in-kind support and maintenance, (3)
policy and practice in child welfare programs, and (4) youth transitions to adulthood. Panelists spoke about ways to improve administration of the SSI program and how to better serve the needs of SSI recipients.

Throughout the year, the Board met with SSA executives and staff, both during monthly Board meeting and in visits to SSA. In March, the Board met with executives and staff at SSA headquarters in Baltimore to discuss issues facing the agency. In May, the Board traveled to San Francisco to meet with regional executives, managers, field staff, and local organizations and members of the public. These meetings give the Board a chance to hear about program administration from top to bottom and receive input from the public about effects on the ground. In particular, the Board continued an ongoing focus on rep payee issues, heard firsthand accounts of SSA's urgent need to upgrade its systems technology, and received updates on SSA's efforts to address the disability workload that had reached 1.2 million pending claims at the hearing level by the end of fiscal year 2016.

SSA's urgent need to modernize its systems technology was also a focus of the Board this year. SSA's decades-old legacy systems create significant expense for the agency as it must spend a large portion of its systems budget on maintenance rather than investing in modern technologies to meet the public's service delivery expectation. Slow system response times, stovepiped networks, and inferior systems technologies significantly undermine the ability of front line employees to serve the public.

In 2016, the Board's work was frequently cited in publications such as the Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, and The Hill. The Board is proud of its work on behalf of the American public and looks forward to continuing its mission in 2017.

Henry J. Aaron, Chair

Lanhee J. Chen • Alan L. Cohen • Barbara B. Kennelly
Dorcas R. Hardy • Jagadeesh Gokhale • Bernadette Franks-Ongoy
Board Members

The Board has seven members. Three are appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. Not more than two of such members shall be from the same political party.

Two members shall be appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate with the advice of the chair and the ranking minority member of the Senate Committee on Finance.

Two members shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, with the advice of the chair and the ranking minority member of the House Committee on Ways and Means.

2016 Board Members

Henry J. Aaron, Chair (D) 2020
Lanhee J. Chen (R) 2018
Alan L. Cohen (D) 2016
Barbara B. Kennelly (D) 2017
Dorcas R. Hardy (R) 2016
Jagadeesh Gokhale (R) 2021
Bernadette Franks-Ongoy (D) 2018

All Board member terms expire September 30th of year indicated
Alan L. Cohen, Ph.D., is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress working on Social Security issues. Previously, he served as senior budget advisor and chief counselor for Social Security for the Senate Committee on Finance from 2001 to 2012. From 1993 to 2001, Dr. Cohen served as senior advisor for budget and economics to the Secretary of the Treasury and from 1999 to 2000, he served as the budget economist for the Senate Committee on Finance. From 1983 to 1992, Dr. Cohen was first the senior economist, and then the assistant staff director for priorities on the U.S. Senate Budget Committee. From 1979 to 1983, Dr. Cohen worked as a policy analyst/economist at the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Cohen received a B.A. from Grinnell College, an M.S.S.W. from the University of Michigan, and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. Current term of office: September 2014 to September 2016.

Barbara B. Kennelly is president of Barbara Kennelly Associates and is a Distinguished Professor at Trinity University. She served as president of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare from 2002 to September 2011. Congresswoman Kennelly served 17 years in the United States House of Representatives, representing the First District of Connecticut. During her congressional career, Congresswoman Kennelly was the first woman elected to serve as the vice chair of the House Democratic Caucus, the first woman to serve on the House Committee on Intelligence, the first woman to serve as chief majority whip, and the third woman in history to serve on the 200-year-old Ways and Means Committee. During the 105th Congress, she was the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Social Security. Prior to her election to Congress, she was the Secretary of State of Connecticut. After serving in Congress, Congresswoman Kennelly was appointed to the position of counselor to the commissioner at SSA. As counselor, Congresswoman Kennelly worked closely with Commissioner Kenneth S. Apfel and members of Congress to inform and educate the American people on the choices they face to ensure solvency of Social Security. She served on the policy committee for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. Congresswoman Kennelly received a B.A. in economics from Trinity College, Hartford. First term of office: January 2006 to September 2011. Current term of office: March 2012 to September 2017.

Barbara B. Kennelly

Dorcas R. Hardy is president of D.R. Hardy & Associates, a government relations and public policy firm serving a diverse portfolio of clients. After her appointment by President Ronald Reagan as assistant secretary of human development services, at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Ms. Hardy was appointed Commissioner of Social Security (1986 to 1989) and was appointed by President George W. Bush to chair the Policy Committee for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. Commissioner Hardy has launched and hosted her own primetime weekly television program, “Financing Your Future,” on Financial News Network and UPI Broadcasting, and “The Senior American,” a NET political program for older Americans. She speaks and writes widely about domestic and international retirement financing issues and entitlement program reforms and is the co-author of Social Insecurity: The Crisis in America’s Social Security System and How to Plan Now for Your Own Financial Survival, Random House, 1992. A former chief executive officer of a rehabilitation technology firm, Commissioner Hardy promotes redesign and modernization of the Social Security, Medicare, and disability insurance systems. Additionally, she chaired a task force to rebuild vocational rehabilitation services for disabled veterans for the Department of Veterans Affairs. She received her B.A. from Connecticut College, her master’s in Business Administration from Pepperdine University, and completed the executive program in Health Policy and Financial Management at Harvard University. Commissioner Hardy is a certified senior advisor and serves on the Board of Directors of Wright Investors’ Service Managed Funds, and First Coast Service Options of Florida. First term of office: April 2002 to September 2004. Second term of office: October 2004 to September 2010. Current term of office: October 2010 to September 2016.

Jagadeesh Gokhale is the Director of Special Projects at Penn Wharton Public Policy Initiative at the University of Pennsylvania (PPI), Prior to joining PPI, Dr. Gokhale was a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. Earlier he worked at the American Enterprise Institute as a visiting scholar (2003), the Treasury Department as a consultant (2002), and the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland as a senior economic advisor (1990–2003). An economist by training, his main research fields are macro and public economics with a special focus on the effects of fiscal policy on future generations. In 2008, he served as a member of the Task Force on Sustainability Issues for the Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board. Dr. Gokhale has written extensively on policy issues including Social Security and Medicare reform, national saving, private insurance, financial planning, wealth inequality, generational accounting, and public intergenerational transfers and he has testified several times before Congress on these topics. He has published several papers in the American Economic Review, Journal of Economic Perspectives, Quarterly Journal of Economics, Review of Economics and Statistics and in publications of the National Bureau of Economic Research and the Cleveland Federal Reserve; in the US Budget report’s Analytical Perspectives; and in newspapers and online media such as the Wall Street Journal, The Financial Times, the Washington Post, American Spectator, and Forbes. Dr. Gokhale is a co-author of Fiscal and Generational Imbalances that revealed the fiscal imbalance to be in the tens of trillions of dollars. In 2010, he published Social Security: A Fresh Look at Policy Alternatives, which constructs a different method for determining solvency of the Social Security trust funds. First term of office: November 2009 to September 2015. Current term of Office: October 2015 to September 2021.

Barbara B. Kennelly
Bernadette Franks-Ongoy is the executive director for Disability Rights Montana, an organization that protects and advocates for the human, legal, and civil rights of Montanans with disabilities. She manages and oversees the day-to-day activities of Disability Rights Montana and sets the tone to ensure that the organization’s mission to advance dignity, equality, and self-determination is being accomplished. Ms. Franks-Ongoy says, “I was raised by a mother with a disability and a father who did not realize he was a feminist.” She lived in an accessible house before the Americans with Disability Act was the law. Her mother’s wheelchair could access every room. “After all mom needed to have access to my brothers and sisters rooms with her wheelchair.” Ms. Franks-Ongoy is the youngest of eight siblings including a brother with a mental illness. Ms. Franks-Ongoy grew up in the sugar plantation town of Waialua, Hawaii. With the support of Job Corps, Social Security, and other financial aid, she attended and graduated from Chaminade University with a Bachelor of Science degree in criminal justice and a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology. She graduated from the University Of San Diego School Of Law in 1983. Her past legal experience includes: law clerk for the First Judicial Circuit Court in Hawaii, founding executive director of the Hawaii Bar Foundation Deputy Corporation Counsel, city and county of Honolulu, and attorney and director of programs for the Protection and Advocacy System in Hawaii. She is licensed to practice law in Hawaii and with the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Ms. Franks-Ongoy has served as president of the National Disability Rights Network and most recently was a member of Montana’s Equal Justice Task Force. Current term of office: January 2013 to September 2018.

Alan Cohen and Dorcas Hardy depart the Board

On September 30th, 2016, the terms of Board members Alan Cohen and Dorcas Hardy ended. Alan Cohen, nominated by President Obama on September 30, 2013, served on the Board since confirmation by the Senate in September 2014. Dorcas Hardy served on the Board for more than 14 years after first being appointed April 9, 2002, and then reappointed in 2004 and 2010. Ms. Hardy succeeded Jo Anne Barnhart who became the Commissioner of SSA.

Ms. Hardy was instrumental in the development and publication of many Board publications, field visits and forums. Ms. Hardy, along with Martha Keys, was instrumental in adding an amendment to Section 417 of the Social Security Protection Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-203) to provide that Board members would be compensated for their hard work. Ms. Hardy was a strong advocate for SSA field office staff and for for expanding service delivery options (other than face-to-face), including the 1-800 number, Internet service options, Kiosks and mobile service options, i.e., mobile field offices such as vans traveling to rural/hard-to-reach areas.

Dr. Cohen gave the Board a new perspective to Board research and reports. He focused the Board on SSA’s budget situation and the need for sustained funding to support SSA’s public service mission. His decades of work in that area of policy meant that he often pressed agency representatives and others to go deeper in their explanations of planning and executing administrative and program integrity workloads.
Kim Hildred appointed to the Board

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Paul Ryan, appointed Kim Hildred to serve on the Social Security Advisory Board, effective October 9, 2016. Ms. Hildred’s six-year term continues through September 2022. Ms. Hildred is president of Hildred Consulting, LLC. She previously served the House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Social Security, as staff director from 1997 to 2015. Prior to that, she worked in various positions in the Social Security Administration, including as a federal liaison with state Disability Determination Services, and deciding Social Security disability claims for the states of Kansas and Wisconsin.

2016 Accomplishments

Board commissions Labor Technical Panel, April 7, 2016

In April, the Board commissioned a Technical Panel to examine future trends in labor supply, a key factor in projections of revenues and expenditures of the Social Security programs. Previous Technical Panels appointed by the Board and tasked to look at the full range of assumptions and methods used in the long-range projections of Social Security finances have noted the complexity of the labor force projection methodology and the need to adequately account for the turbulent forces shaping our current and future U.S. labor market. Many questions require further investigation. The Labor Technical Panel met throughout 2016, including a two day meeting in June 2016 at the SSAB office in DC. The Panel will make recommendations on how best to improve those assumptions and methods used by the Trustees and the methods employed by the Office of the Chief Actuary to project the size of the labor force and rates of labor force participation. The Panel will publish a report of its findings in June 2017.

CHARTER: The Panel will evaluate the assumptions used by the Trustees and the methods employed by the Office of the Chief Actuary to project the size of the labor force and rates of labor force participation, and will make recommendations on how best to improve those assumptions and methods. The Panel members will meet in public at least three times and deliver a written report to the Board with their recommendations within 7 months of their first meeting.

Robert A Moffitt (Chair) is the Krieger-Eisenhower Professor of Economics at Johns Hopkins University, where he has worked since 1995. He also holds a joint appointment at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. Prior to assuming his positions at Hopkins, he was Professor of Economics at Brown University, where he taught for eleven years. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Wisconsin and the University of Maryland, and worked for several years at Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Dr. Moffitt is also a Fellow of the Econometric Society, a Fellow of the Society of Labor Economists, a National Associate of the National Academy of Sciences, a recipient of a MERIT Award from the National Institutes of Health, a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and Past President of the Population Association of America. Dr. Moffitt earned a B.A. in Economics from Rice University in 1970, and a M.A. in 1972 and a Ph.D. in 1975, both in Economics from Brown University.

Gary Burtless holds the John C. and Nancy D. Whitehead Chair in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC. He does research on issues connected with the income distribution and poverty, public finance, aging, labor markets, social insurance, and behavioral effects of government taxes and transfer policy. Before coming to Brookings in 1981, he served as an economist in the policy and evaluation offices of the U.S. Secretary of Labor and the U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. In 1993 he was Visiting Professor of Public Affairs at the University of Maryland, College Park. Dr. Burtless graduated from Yale College in 1972 and received a Ph.D. in Economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1977.

Chinhui Juhn is currently Henry Graham Professor of Economics at the University of Houston, a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) and a fellow at the Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA). Professor Juhn’s research has focused on U.S. wage inequality and its causes and the impact of changing wage structure on other labor market outcomes, such as employment and unemployment, and the racial wage gap. Her current work examines issues in earnings
Kevin M. Murphy

Kevin M. Murphy is the first professor at a business school to be chosen as a MacArthur Fellow. He was selected for “revealing economic forces shaping vital social phenomena such as wage inequality, unemployment, addiction, medical research, and economic growth.” In addition to his position at the University of Chicago, Dr. Murphy works as a faculty research associate for the National Bureau of Economic Research. Dr. Murphy’s research focuses on the well-being of the elderly with particular attention paid to public and private transfers, including the Medicare and SSI programs, and the transfer of resources within families. His research combines work on the financial aspects of aging with issues related to health economics to examine insurance coverage among the elderly. He has studied the long-term care, health, and life insurance markets, as well as the role played by families in providing insurance for their least well-off members. Dr. Murphy’s current work analyzes the importance of end of life medical expenses, particularly expenses associated with nursing homes and home health care, and differences in spending by disability status. Dr. McGarry received both her Ph.D. in Economics and her B.S. in Mathematics from the State University of New York, Stony Brook.

Kathleen McGarry

Kathleen McGarry is a Professor of Economics at UCLA and a Research Associate at the NBER. From 2007-2009 she was the Joel Z. and Susan Hyatt, 1972 Professor of Economics at Dartmouth College and previously served as a Senior Economist at the White House. She has had fellowships from the Brookdale Foundation and the National Bureau of Economic Research. Dr. McGarry’s research focuses on the well-being of the elderly with particular attention paid to public and private transfers, including the Medicare and SSI programs, and the transfer of resources within families. Her research combines work on the financial aspects of aging with issues related to health economics to examine insurance coverage among the elderly. She has studied the long-term care, health, and life insurance markets, as well as the role played by families in providing insurance for their least well-off members. Dr. McGarry’s current work analyzes the importance of end of life medical expenses, particularly expenses associated with nursing homes and home health care, and differences in spending by disability status. Dr. McGarry received both her Ph.D. in Economics and her B.S. in Mathematics from the State University of New York, Stony Brook.

Baltimore Therapeutic Equipment’s (BTE) corporate headquarters where Connie Miller, Certified Disability Management Specialist (CDMS), Certified Case Manager (CCM), Certified Professional Ergonomist (CPE), and Vice
President Business Development and Angela Berwick, Registered Occupational Therapist (OTR), Clinical Manager of Onsite Programs, provided an overview of BTE’s program services to assess an individual’s residual functional capacity and also an interactive demonstration of BTE’s EvalTech system. Information from these valuable sessions allowed Board members to gain a better understanding of measuring functional capacity and alternatives for SSA’s disability adjudication process.

San Francisco Region Trip, May 1-4, 2016:

The Board visited the San Francisco region for its annual Board trip. The Board uses these trips to gain insight into how SSA programs are administered and to obtain feedback regarding programs and policies that are implemented by the SSA executives who brief the Board. From May 2 - 4, 2016, the Board traveled to Oakland, California to meet with San Francisco Regional employees, including Regional Executives, management, and front-line employees. During this trip, the Board focused on systems modernization concerns, workload challenges, and rep payee issues.

The Board met with staff from Operations components, such as the Oakland District office and the Western Program Service Center. The Board also held discussions with the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review, Office of the General Counsel, Office of Quality Review, and the Office of the Inspector General. The Board heard concerns from agency staff and management in separate meetings, to ensure confidentiality and candid comments. During these meetings, the Board gained valuable insight about local and national issues, as well as ideas for improving Social Security service and programs. Feedback was used to conduct research and topics addressed could be the subject of future Board reports or issue briefs.

In addition to meetings with SSA staff, the Board held a public forum at the San Pablo Community Center co-sponsored by Lao Family Community Development, West County, the West County Senior Coalition, and the League of Women Voters. At the forum, Board members heard directly from members of the public and local non-profit organizations who shared their experiences and frustrations in their interactions with SSA. It was clear that service delivery delays were of enormous concern, but most of the attendees offered concrete suggestions on how to improve Social Security outreach and service to the public.

The Board also met with an organizational payee for homeless veterans, Swords to Plowshares, who described their duties and responsibilities as a rep payee to their clients and their methods for securing housing for those in need. Swords to Plowshares identified issues such as regional management’s non-responsiveness to the organization. The Board brought this to the attention of regional leadership for resolution, and they reached out immediately. The information the Board learned from Swords to Plowshares contributed to ongoing research on rep payees for future papers, such as the Board’s Annual SSI Statement and contributed to the decision to hold a forum on the rep payee program.

“We visit with the dedicated Social Security employees who work day to day trying to serve the American people. And, when possible, we talk to you—the people for whom these programs are intended to serve. We are here to listen to your concerns, your experience, your ideas and your advice. We will take what we learn back to Washington DC, and use it to help us formulate recommendations to the Administration and to Congress to improve how these programs work.

Henry Aaron
SSI Forum, July 12, 2016

The Board conducted a Policy Forum on the SSI Program at the Carnegie Library in Washington, DC on July 12, 2016. The Board designed the event to elicit new ideas and foster a bipartisan discussion of the SSI program, especially the children’s program. The forum included panel discussions on SSI resource limits, in-kind support and maintenance rules, and the policies and practices in SSI and the welfare system that pertain to children. The day-long event was attended by federal policy-makers, Hill staff and members of the advocacy community and brought forward ideas and some general agreement from across the political spectrum. Perhaps the most important result was the commitment of panelists to meet and continue to discuss how to address through public policy the issues pertaining to children and program simplification. The Board used the results of the forum to inform its work, craft reports and statements on the importance of work incentives and find a balance of integrity and programmatic simplification in SSI.

The lively back-and-forth went into levels of detail not usually explored when discussing the complex policies underpinning the SSI program. The Board and audience members engaged in a dialogue with panelists representing think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, House Ways and Means Committee staff and the Office of the Speaker of the House, SSA managers and researchers, and others. A lawyer representing the Speaker of the House, SSA and others. A lawyer representing the Speaker of the House, SSA managers and researchers, and others. A lawyer representing the Speaker of the House addressed the approach some states have taken to collect those children’s SSI payments.

The Board convened experts from across the experiential and philosophical spectrum and asked tough questions about the role of cash payments in the effort to reduce poverty and protect vulnerable children with disabilities. The discussion included a remarkable exchange in which the current resource limits in the SSI program were described in a bipartisan fashion as a profound disincentive to work. On another panel, researchers gave status reports on large-scale demonstration projects studying children on SSI. For example, findings from the Youth Transition Demonstration underscored that the role of parents is key in any policy designed to assist children with disabilities to transition from the SSI program to eventual financial independence. A House of Representatives aide outlined Speaker Ryan’s “A Better Way” proposal; the proposal includes a broad strategy shift from cash payments to families in order to cover the extraordinary costs associated with caring for a child with disabilities into a more robust service delivery model that provides needed supports directly to children with disabilities. The Board plans to use what was learned at the event to inform its work in 2017 and beyond.

At nearly $60 billion in federal spending in 2014, SSI is among the nation’s largest means-tested welfare programs. Of the 8.3 million SSI cash recipients, 1.3 million are children under the age of 18.

Robert Rector and Romina Boccia
Highlights of the Monthly Board Meetings

The Board held eleven monthly meetings between January and December, including a visit to the San Francisco Region and visit to SSA headquarters in Woodlawn, MD. In place of a Board meeting in July, the Board held a public forum on the SSI program.

In 2016, the Board met several times with Acting Commissioner Carolyn Colvin, Chief Actuary Stephen Goss, and deputy commissioners from various components in order to discuss agency challenges and efforts to improve public service and achieve common goals.

Meeting topics for 2016 included SSA’s Strategic Plan and Critical Eight Priorities; SSA’s Office of the General Counsel’s organizational structure and current workloads; SSA’s Vision 2025 and data analytics report; SSA systems modernization; and the status and effectiveness of the Disability Case Processing System, Administrative Law Judge hiring, and a multi-year, multi-million dollar effort to integrate multiple state computer legacy systems into a single system. As the Board conducted its research throughout the year, again and again the limitations of SSA’s data exchange process emerged as a barrier to effective research and program administration within SSA and beyond.

Data exchange is governed by statute and the Board learned that the law has not kept pace with technological improvements that would simplify the exchange process while protecting the privacy of the people whose data are at issue. What the Board learned about data exchange has informed multiple projects. In addition to data exchange, the Board heard from SSA Executives and other experts regarding ALJ workloads and challenges, as well as suggestions to improve the disability application process. The Board also consulted with specialists on project topics, such as work on promoting data analytics at the agency, and SSA’s commissioned published report on financial capability, “Informing Social Security’s Process for Financial Capability Determination.”

The Board met with Rob Klopp, Deputy Commissioner for Systems and Chief Information Officer at SSA four times throughout 2016. Mr. Klopp spoke with the Board in January, June, September and December of 2016. The frequent check-ins with Mr. Klopp helped the Board grasp a better understanding of the enormous project Mr. Klopp and his team were undertaking with legacy systems and the challenges that face them. It also gave the Board the opportunity to observe the progress and follow the AGILE process. The Board also met with Tom Sechler, Chief Executive Officer of MicroPact who is designing a separate update to the Disability Case Processing System to see the other side of the issue.

Additional Outreach

A bi-partisan example of raising awareness on a key issue, Board members Henry Aaron and Lanhee Chen published joint op-ed in Politico on OPM hiring deficiencies, March 1, 2016

On March 1, Board Chair Henry Aaron and Board member Lanhee Chen wrote a joint article in Politico, titled “How to fix the backlog of disability claims.” The Board members pointed to the inadequate number of ALJs available to keep up with the backlog.

Dr. Aaron and Dr. Chen focused particularly to a bottleneck at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). OPM hires all ALJs, so SSA is unable to hire more, even when there are funds available. The article pointed to a long history of delays at OPM that have hindered SSA’s ability to hire ALJs. Given difficulties at OPM, the Board members recommended moving responsibility for hiring ALJs to another agency, such as the Administrative Conference of the United States.

SSA employs 85 percent of all ALJs and for several years has paid OPM approximately $2 million annually to administer the requisite tests and interviews to establish a register of qualified candidates. Nonetheless, OPM has persistently refused to employ legally trained people to vet ALJ candidates or to update registers.

Henry Aaron and Lanhee Chen

A robot named Nicole, equipped with IBM Watson technology attends the September Board meeting. The team from IBM discussed how this technology could assist SSA in the future.

A robot named Nicole, equipped with IBM Watson technology attends the September Board meeting. The team from IBM discussed how this technology could assist SSA in the future.
On April 6, Board Chair Henry Aaron gave the keynote address at the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget's (CRFB) event to release the report of its Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Solutions Initiative. Dr. Aaron urged policymakers to focus on improving the design and administration of the disability programs for the benefit of taxpayers and those with disabilities alike. Dr. Aaron noted that while solvency of the SSDI trust fund was averted until 2022, it takes time to develop, implement, and evaluate new designs.

Dr. Aaron encouraged policymakers to think about ways to modernize the SSDI program to adapt to modern thinking about disabilities and advancements in technology and the workplace. In particular, Dr. Aaron pointed to demonstration projects as a good way to test new ideas. However, he critiqued the Promoting Opportunity Demonstration Project for a design flaw that makes it unlikely to be successful. That process will take all the time available between now and 2021 or 2022 when the DI trust fund will again demand attention. It will take a good deal more time than that to address the formidable and intriguing research agenda of the SSDI Solutions Initiative.

Dr. Aaron highlighted issues that the Board worked on in 2016, including the need improve the hiring process of ALJs to address the disability hearings backlog. Dr. Aaron stated that procedural reforms may be needed to prevent the “unconscionable delays” applicants face to receive a hearing before an ALJ. Dr. Aaron also spoke about the Board’s publication, Representative Payees: A Call to Action, describing the repayeep program the “most important problem the public has never heard of.” He noted that with the Baby Boom generation retiring, the number of people needing assistance managing their benefits is going to rapidly increase, yet SSA is not well-equipped to administer this type of social service function.

That is not how the current disability determination process works. It considers the availability of jobs in the national, not the local economy. It ignores the availability of work supports or accommodations by potential employers.

Henry Aaron

Living with disabilities today is markedly different from what it was in 1956 when the Disability Insurance program began. Yet, the DI program has changed little. Beneficiaries and taxpayers pay heavily the failure of public policy to apply what has been learned over the past six decades about health, disability, function, and work.

Henry Aaron

Staff Director and SSAB staff provide training to Mathematica Fellows, July 14, 2016

As part of the Board’s mission to educate the public, Staff Director Claire Green and Board staff provided training to Mathematica Policy Research summer Fellows. They covered social security topics such as Disability to provide insight into the program’s inner workings and issues. They also discussed SSAB’s role in social security.
SSA’s representative payee services manage their benefits and these payees managed $77 billion in benefits in 2014. SSA faces a balancing act—ensuring oversight of payees to protect beneficiaries while not imposing reporting requirements that might overload the family and friends who are the vast majority of payees.

In addition to overseeing payees for beneficiaries in current pay, our nation needs a plan to identify proactive beneficiaries that begin receiving benefits as capable adults, but later need assistance managing their benefits, such as aging seniors. With the burgeoning population of older beneficiaries, the need for a better system will only grow, and SSA is not well equipped to handle this workload. Identifying beneficiaries who may need fiduciary support is a challenge for SSA, an agency focused primarily on ensuring that benefits are paid.

The Board found that the decision to assign a representative payee is black or white. Either the representative payee has full control or the SSI recipient does not receive a representative payee. Of course, representative payees may choose to take input from the recipient, but there is no legal obligation to do so. The Board encouraged SSA to move toward a policy of supportive decision making rather than substitute decision making—allowing some SSI recipients to have some control over spending decisions.

The Board is committed to continuing to pursue this important work. It is clear that these issues go beyond SSA; there are parallels with other government benefit-paying agencies and state courts, as well with an aging population the number of people who may transition into the need for assistance will continue to grow over the coming decades. The Board does not claim there are ready answers to these questions but stresses the need for more research and collaboration, media interest, Congressional commitment, and public outreach and awareness.

Rethinking the Promoting Opportunity Demonstration Project: A Report to the Board, May 2016

In May, the Board published an independent report authored by Dr. Michael Wiseman, a visiting scholar to SSAB from January until May 2016. The report Rethinking the Promoting Opportunity Demonstration Project built on the Board’s August 2013 publication The Case for Terminating the Benefits Offset National Demonstration. In its 2013 position paper, the Board concluded that BOND should be terminated as it was “both without merit and costly,” citing that a pilot project had already been performed with informative results. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 extended SSA’s authority to conduct demonstration projects and mandated implementation of the Promoting Opportunity Demonstration Project to encourage work for those receiving Social Security disability benefits. The Board commissioned Dr. Wiseman, research professor of public policy, public administration, and economics at George Washington University to write a report to the Board evaluating the design of the new demonstration project. The views reflected in the report are solely those of Dr. Wiseman.

Dr. Wiseman’s report drew attention to several weaknesses in the project’s design: (1) the new offset rules create work disincentives and inequities, (2) the mandated demonstration unnecessarily replicates features of other demonstrations currently in progress, and (3) certain mandated elements of the demonstration will make it impossible to draw inferences from the demonstration on how plausible policies would affect behavior nationwide. Because of these weaknesses, Dr. Wiseman recommended delay or redesign of the demonstration project.

Continuing to look at the Rep Payee Program in the Board’s annual Supplemental Security Income Statement, July 2016

The Board’s SSI Statement encouraged SSA to provide the possibility for some individuals with rep payees to play more of a role in managing their own benefits. The Board noted that while ability of many SSI recipients with rep payees falls on a spectrum, the decision to provide a representative payee is black or white. Either the representative payee has full control or the SSI recipient does not receive a representative payee. Of course, representative payees may choose to take input from the recipient, but there is no legal obligation to do so. The Board encouraged SSA to move toward a policy of supportive decision making rather than substitute decision making—allowing some SSI recipients to have some control over spending decisions.

The Board found that the decision to assign a representative payee sometimes appears arbitrary and that a better process should be in place to guard the rights of individuals. Though representative payees play an important role in serving those who need them, assigning a representative payee also takes away a certain amount of autonomy. The Board’s SSI Statement pointed out disparities between states—ranging from the percentage of SSI recipients with a representative payee varies from 21.3 percent in New York to 39.4 percent in Utah. The Board called for more analysis to explain this phenomenon and to design a better system.
Public Inquiries

In 2016, Board staff tracked 458 contacts with the public, including letters, faxes, emails, and phone calls. Top reasons for contacting the Board included (1) complaints about SSA service; (2) questions about eligibility for benefits; and (3) attempts to determine case or payment status.

Over the years, the Board office has received an increasingly higher number of inquiries from the public. Board staff received about 4 times more public inquiries in 2016, than in 2014 when it first collected this information receiving 116 public inquiries. As waiting times increase on the 1-800 number and in field offices, and as disability backlogs grow, the Board hears about it. SSA service complaint has remained as the primary reason for the public's contact to the Board.

As part of its broader mission to serve and educate the public, “increasing public understanding of the social security system” the Board strives to listen, respond to, and track those communications. Board staff uses these contacts to gather feedback about issues facing the public in its interaction with the Social Security programs. While the Board communicates that it is independent from SSA and cannot resolve issues on individual claims or access case files, staff answer questions, give general information about the claims process, and will try to refer individuals to the appropriate SSA component or Congressional office. In urgent need circumstances, such as fraud and identity theft, Board staff will alert SSA of an issue. The Board staff call attention to cases that need immediate intervening or policy action by way of the SSA liason. Often times Board staff will be educating the public on online services such as applying online for a replacement social security card, the 1-800 number, field office hours and locations.

Public Inquiry Issues:

» SSA Service Complaints
» Benefit Eligibility Questions
» Case Status
» Benefit Reduction or Overpayment
» Fraud and Identity Theft
» Social Security Legislation

PUBLIC INQUIRIES BY THE NUMBERS

458 TOTAL INQUIRIES

406 BY PHONE

37 BY EMAIL

13 BY LETTER

51 SSA SERVICE COMPLAINTS

44 BENEFIT ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONS

45 CASE STATUS INQUIRIES

61 PEOPLE INFORMED ABOUT ONLINE SERVICES AT SSA.GOV
The Board had several SSA detailees contribute to projects in 2016. Laura King, social science research analyst from the Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support (ORDES) detailed from April to August. Obie Blackmon, management and program analyst from Office of Income Security Programs (OISP) detailed from April to September. Jeanette Mandycz, an attorney from Office of General Counsel detailed from June to November. Fran Huber, a policy advisor, also from OISP, started her detail in April which will continue until March 2017. Joyce Nicholas, social science research analyst, also from ORDES, started her detail in August and will continue to detail into 2017.

Matthew Graves joined the Board staff in January 2016. He serves as a program assistant and also assists with policy research on social security issues.

Matthew Comey joined the Board as a Research Fellow in August 2016. He is focusing on creating charts from social security data as well as undertaking research for SSI issue briefs.
Board Meetings

January

Stephen C. Goss, Chief Actuary, Office of the Chief Actuary, SSA
Michael Wiseman, Research Professor of Public Policy, Public Administration, and Economics, George Washington University Institute of Public Policy
Robert Klop, Deputy Commissioner of Systems/Chief Information Officer, SSA

February

Molly Burgdorf, Senior Advisor, Center for Policy and Evaluation, Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services
Jonathan Martinis, Project Director, National Resource Center for Support Decision-Making (grantee of the Administration for Community Living)
Steve Kofahl, retired SSA Claims Representative and American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Union Official
Stacy Rodgers, Chief of Staff, SSA
Ruby Burrell, Chief Strategic Officer, SSA
Andy Liu, General Counsel, SSA
Mary Ann Zimmermann, Acting Deputy Executive Director, Office of General Counsel, Office of Privacy and Disclosure, SSA

March

Andrew LaMont Eanes, Senior Advisor to the Acting Commissioner of Social Security, SSA
Robin Sabatino, Associate Commissioner, Office of Electronic Services and Technology, SSA
Terry Gruber, Deputy Commissioner, ODAR, SSA
Linda Kerr-Davis, Acting Chief Program Officer, Disability Case Processing System, SSA

April

Dr. Paul Appelbaum, Chair of Committee to Evaluate the Social Security Administration’s Capability Determination Process for Adult Beneficiaries, Institute of Medicine
Frederick Erdtmann, Board Director, Board on the Health of Select Populations, Institute of Medicine
Carol Spicer, staff member, Board on the Health of Select Populations, Institute of Medicine
Frank Valliere, staff member, Board on the Health of Select Populations, Institute of Medicine
Stephen Evangelista, Associate Commissioner, Office of Data Exchange and Policy Publications, SSA
Patrick O’Carroll, Inspector General, Office of the Inspector General, SSA
Marilyn Zahm, President, Association of Administrative Law Judges
Linda Stagno, Vice President for New York Region, Association of Administrative Law Judges

May

BOARD TRIP TO SAN FRANCISCO
Steve Breen, Deputy Regional Commissioner, SSA
Hy Hinojosa, Assistant Regional Commissioner for Management and Operations Support, SSA
Tayo Ajose, Employee Training and Development Team, SSA
Rosa M. Rodriguez, Employee Training and Development Team, SSA
Adam Terry, Deputy Area Director, Bay Area, SSA
Christina Marin, District Manager, SSA
Patricia Raymond, Regional Communications Director, SSA
John Beem, Chief Financial Officer, Swords for Plowshares (Organizational Payee)
Jennifer Horne, Regional Chief Administrative Law Judge, ODAR, SSA
Robert Barth, Acting Regional Management Officer, SSA

June

Marie Avelar Simas, Special Projects Officer, SSA
Grace Kim, ALJ, ODAR, SSA
John Flanagan, ALJ, ODAR, SSA
Major Williams, ALJ, ODAR, SSA
Debby Ellis, Assistant Regional Commissioner for Processing Center Operations, Western Program Service Center, SSA

July

SSI FORUM
Carolyn Colvin, Acting Commissioner of Social Security, SSA

Ken Brown, Office of Supplemental Security Income and Program Integrity Policy, Office of Income Security Programs, SSA
Chris Rodriguez, Senior Public Policy Advisor, National Disability Institute
Ezra Levin, Associate Director of Government Affairs, Corporation for Enterprise Development
Romina Boccia, Deputy Director, Thomas A. Roe Institute for Economic Policy Studies and Grover M. Hermann Fellow, Heritage Foundation
Ken Brown, Office of Supplemental Security Income and Program Integrity Policy, Office of Income Security Programs, SSA
Bernie Wixon and Jim Sears, Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics, SSA
Stacy Braverman-Cloyd, Deputy Director of Government Affairs, National Organization of Social Security Claimants’ Representatives
Anne DeCesaro, Subcommittee Staff Director for Human Resources, U.S. House Ways and Means Committee
TJ Sutcliffe, Director of Income and Housing Policy, The Arc
Ted McCann, Assistant to the Speaker for Policy, Office of Speaker Paul P. Ryan, U.S. House of Representatives
LaDonna Pavetti, Vice President for Family Income Support Policy, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities
Daniel Hatcher, Professor of Law, University of Baltimore Law School
Leslie Jose Lyons, Program Director for Nationwide Social Security Advocacy Management Services, Public Consulting Group
Jeff Hemmeter, Deputy Director, ORDES, SSA
Manasi Deshpande, Assistant Professor of Economics, University of Chicago
Howard H. Goldman, Professor of Psychiatry, University of Maryland School of Medicine

September

Robert Klop, Deputy Commissioner of Systems/Chief Information Officer, SSA
Barbara Hoover, SSA Watson Project Representative, IBM
Dr. Leighton Chan, Chief, Rehabilitation Medicine Department, Clinical Center, National Institutes of Health (NIH)
Dr. Beth Rasch, Staff Scientist and Chief, Epidemiology and Biostatistics, NIH
Dr. Diane Brandt, Protocol Manager, Epidemiology and Biostatistics, NIH
Susan Wilschke, Deputy Associate Commissioner, ORES, SSA
Reafel Rigg, Office of Data Analysis (ODA) Acting Director, Office of Retirement and Disability Policy, ORDES, ODA, SSA
Tony Notaro, ODA NIH Project Manager, ORDP, ORDES, SSA
Tamar Khafi, ODA Social Science Research Analyst, ORDP, ORDES, SSA
Lisa Ekman, Deputy Chief Actuary, SSA
Karen Glenn, Chief Actuary, SSA
Steve Goss, Chief, CBO Long-term Analysis Unit
Julie Topoleski, Chief, CBO Long-term Analysis Unit
John Phillips, Associate Commissioner, ORES, SSA

December
Robert Klop, Deputy Commissioner/Chief Information Officer, Systems, SSA
Tom Klouda, Senior Domestic Policy Advisor, Senate Committee on Finance
Sam Conchuratt, Assistant to the Democratic Staff Director, Senate Committee on Finance
Kathryn Olson, Staff Director, House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Social Security
Joel Eskovitz, Democratic Deputy Staff Director/Chief Counsel, Senate Special Committee on Aging
Tom Sechler, Chief Executive Officer, MicroPact
Amy Stuart, Staff Director, House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Social Security
Anne DeCesaro, Staff Director, House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Social Security
Rosemary Lahasky, Professional Staff, House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Human Resources
Jeff Wrase, Chief Economist, Senate Committee on Finance
David Timmons, Policy Advisor, Senate Committee on Finance

October
Manasi Deshpande, Assistant Professor of Economics, University of Chicago
Stacy Rodgers, Chief of Staff, SSA
Ruby Burrell, Chief Strategic Officer, SSA
Steve Goss, Chief Actuary, SSA
Karen Glenn, Deputy Chief Actuary, SSA
Lisa Ekman, Director of Government Affairs, National Organization of Social Security Claimants’ Representatives (NOSSCR)

November
Jack Smalligan, Deputy Associate Director, Education, Income Maintenance and Labor Division, OMB, Executive Office of the President (EOP)
Gale Stone, Acting Inspector General, SSA
Rona Lawson, Assistant Inspector General, SSA
Commissioner Carolyn Colvin, SSA

Compendium of Board Reports and Publications, 1997 - 2016

- Views of the Board on SSI and Areas of Concern, May 1999.
- How the Social Security Administration Can Improve Its Service to the Public, September 1999.
- SSA’s Obligation to Ensure that the Public’s Funds are Responsibly Collected and Expended, March 2002.
- The Impact of Immigration on Social Security and the National Economy, December 2005.
- Board Comments on Ticket to Work Regula- tions, December 2005.
- Improving the Social Security Administration’s

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- The Need to Re-examine the SSI Program, May 2008.
- Bridging the Gap: Improving SSA’s Public Service through Technology, April 2009.
- The Unsustainable Cost of Healthcare, September 2009.
- Facing the Challenges – Envisioning the Future, July 2013.
- The Case for Terminating the Benefit Offset, National Demonstration, August 2013.
- Supplemental Security Income Statement: SSI and Foster Care Programs, May 2014.
- The Windfall Elimination Provision: It’s Time to Correct the Math, October 2015.

Reports are available on the Board’s website at www.ssab.gov.

Compendium of Reports to the Board
- The 2011 Technical Panel on Assumptions and Methods, September 2011.
- Rethinking the Promoting Opportunity Demonstration Project: A Report to the Board, May 2016.