Social Security Advisory Board
Minutes
Board Meeting
May 8-9, 2012

Location: Atlanta, Georgia

Time: 8:00 a.m. – 5:15 p.m. (May 8)
7:45 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. (May 9)

SSAB Members: Marsha Katz, Acting Chair
Jagadeesh Gokhale
Dorcas Hardy
Barbara Kennelly
Mark Warshawsky

Participants

SSA: Ollie L. (Dockie) Garmon, III, Atlanta Regional Chief
      Administrative Law Judge (ALJ)
      R. Dirk Selland, Atlanta Assistant Regional Chief ALJ
      Amy Roberts, Atlanta Assistant Regional Commissioner for
      Management and Operations Support
      Rose Mary Buehler, Assistant Regional Commissioner for
      Southeastern Processing Center Operations
      Robert L. Raines, Atlanta Director for Quality Performance
      Nathan Holmes, Atlanta Director for the Center for Disability
      Barbara Hites, Disability Program Administrator for Georgia
      Gloria Brown, Atlanta Regional Writing Unit Supervisor
      Ken Temple, Atlanta Regional Field Liaison Branch Supervisor
      Staffs of the Covington, Atlanta North, and Atlanta
      Downtown Hearing Offices
      Staffs of the Marietta and Gwinnett Field Offices

Alabama DDS: Norman Ippolito, Administrator

Advocates: Sally Atwell, Project Director, Benefits Navigator, The
            Shepherd Center, Atlanta
            Crystal Beelner, Program Director, Georgia Advocacy Office, Inc.,
            Decatur
            Christy Dunaway, Affiliate Liaison and Executive Director,
            LIFE (Living Independence for Everyone) of Mississippi,
            Southeast ADA Center, Biloxi
            Peggy Withrow, Senior Vice President for Business Services,
            Nobis Works, Inc., Atlanta
In May, the Board visited Atlanta for a series of meetings held over a two day period. During the morning of May 8, the members met with three panels of experts to discuss issues related to the Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability programs. The first panel, made up of SSA executives Ollie L. Garmon, III, Rose Mary Buehler, Robert L. Raines, Nathan Holmes, and Norman Ippolito, discussed problems such as SSA’s increasing workloads and its budget constraints. They described a number of initiatives that the agency has underway, including a predictive model developed by the Office of Quality Performance that identifies cases at the hearing level that may result in awards to beneficiaries. The second panel, made up of advocates Sally Atwell, Crystal Beelner, Christy Dunaway, and Peggy Withrow, discussed issues that prohibit individuals with disabilities from entering and staying in the workforce. The panel offered a number of recommendations on how to help these individuals obtain and keep jobs, including raising the substantial gainful activity level and simplifying the return to work process. The third panel, consisting of academicians Robert S. Kistenberg, Quienton L. Nichols, and Ani B. Satz, told the Board about the difficulties the public has with getting information about the Social Security programs and how disabled individuals remain isolated and unemployed. They also discussed the services that disabled individuals need to enter the workforce and to remain employed.

During lunch on May 8, the Board met with Amy Roberts, Nathan Holmes, and Barbara Hites to discuss the status of the Georgia Disability Determination Services’ operations and also SSA’s Disability Case Processing System (DCPS). The Board was told that tremendous progress has been made with the DDS’ workloads – they are much more manageable, productivity has increased, and processing times are shorter. The Board also heard about the potential enhancements incorporated in the new DCPS, including the ability to move work around the country, thus allowing offices to assist each other in working down case backlogs.

During the afternoon of May 8, the Board met with Office of Disability Adjudication and Review representatives including Ollie L. Garmon, III, R. Dirk Selland, Gloria Brown, Ken Temple, and staffs from the Covington, Atlanta North, and Atlanta Downtown hearing offices to discuss challenges and successes of managing ODAR backlogs and improving performance. Staff from the Atlanta Downtown office explained how, during the course of four years, they were able to bring the office up from last place to number 44 (out of 161 hearing offices). The Atlanta North hearing office staff told the Board of how, in two years, they have been able to work down the number of aged cases in the office from over 1,400 to 118. Staff from the
Covington hearing office described how they were able to successfully open a new office a few years ago and always meet their case processing time goals.

Later in the afternoon of May 8, the Board members met briefly in executive session to discuss current and future projects, upcoming meeting agendas, and a possible disability forum in November. They also approved a draft of the Board’s official statement that is to be published in SSA’s 2012 Annual Report of the SSI Program.

During the morning of May 9, the Board members split up and met with staffs at the Marietta and Gwinnett field offices, both in the Atlanta metropolitan area. At the offices the staffs discussed a number of their concerns, such as incomplete disability applications filed over the Internet, the public’s problems with selecting the most advantageous month for retirement benefits to begin when filing an Internet claim, and overpayments caused when disabled beneficiaries return to work. They also provided a number of recommendations on how SSA’s operations could work more efficiently and on how to better serve the public.

I certify that the minutes written for the May 8-9, 2012 meeting of the Social Security Advisory Board are correct.

Marsha Katz
Date: June 19, 2012
Acting Chair
Social Security Advisory Board