

## United States Senate

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6400

(202) 224-5364

February 14, 2025

The Honorable Scott Bessent  
Secretary  
Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Bessent,

I write concerning the Department of Government Efficiency's (DOGE's) access to the Treasury's Payments Systems, and the risk that access poses to older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities. The Treasury's Payments Systems oversee payments for Social Security, Medicare, and veterans' benefits. Those programs are critical for the well-being of America's older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities. While the Treasury Department claims that the DOGE has "read only" access to the Treasury's Payments Systems, DOGE leadership boasted of ending certain government payments after receiving access.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, DOGE's access to the Treasury's Payments Systems may allow DOGE to unilaterally end Social Security, Medicare, and veterans' benefits, while also endangering the privacy of millions of Americans. Given those concerns, I ask the Treasury Department to answer questions about DOGE's access to the Treasury's Payments Systems and the Treasury Department's plans to speak to the American public about DOGE's access.

The Payment Automation Manager and the Secure Payment System are mechanisms that help to facilitate payments from the federal government.<sup>2</sup> The Payment Automation Manager is used by the federal government "to pay all bills, except payments in foreign currency."<sup>3</sup> The Secure Payment System, meanwhile, is used by agencies to "securely create, certify, and submit payments to the Fiscal Service."<sup>4</sup> Together, these Treasury Payments Systems have been described as the federal government's "checkbook."<sup>5</sup> The Bureau of the Fiscal Services, a

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Department of Treasury to Members of Congress, February 4, 2025, (hereinafter "Treasury Letter to Congress"), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0009>; Gregory Korte and Viktoria Dendrinou, "Musk Says DOGE Halting Treasury Payments to US Contractors," *Bloomberg*, February 2, 2025, (hereinafter "*Bloomberg Federal Payments Article*"), <https://www.yahoo.com/news/musk-says-doge-halting-treasury-020337006.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Vittoria Elliott, Dhruv Mehrotra, Leah Feiger, and Tim Marchman, "A 25-Year-Old With Elon Musk Ties Has Direct Access to the Federal Payment System," *Wired*, February 4, 2025, <https://www.wired.com/story/elon-musk-associate-bfs-federal-payment-system/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Payment Automation Manager (PAM)," Bureau of the Fiscal Service, last modified January 8, 2025, <https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/pam/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Secure Payment System," Bureau of the Fiscal Service, last modified May 26, 2024, <https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/sps/>.

<sup>5</sup> April Rubin, "What is the Bureau of the Fiscal Service, the Government's \$5 Trillion Checkbook," *Axios*, February 3, 2025, <https://www.axios.com/2025/02/03/musk-doge-government-payments-treasury-fiscal-service>.

component agency of the Treasury Department, uses the Treasury's Payments Systems to disburse nearly 90 percent of all federal payments.<sup>6</sup> Programs that use the Treasury's Payments Systems include Social Security, Medicare, and veterans' benefits.<sup>7</sup>

Millions of older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities rely on Social Security, Medicare, and veterans' payments to make ends meet. Nearly nine out of ten older adults and over seven million veterans received a Social Security benefit in 2024, while Social Security Disability Insurance serves millions of workers with disabilities and their children.<sup>8</sup> Medicare provides health insurance coverage to roughly 68 million people, including adults age 65 or over and people with disabilities.<sup>9</sup> The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) granted benefits to over one million veterans and their survivors in fiscal year 2024 alone, including health care, education benefits, and disability compensation.<sup>10</sup> The Americans who receive those benefits rely on the Treasury's Payments Systems to properly administer payments, and on the Treasury Department to safeguard their personal information. Accordingly, the public servants at the Bureau of the Fiscal Services have historically administered the government's payments in a professional and nonpartisan fashion.<sup>11</sup>

I am alarmed that, on January 31, the Treasury Department allowed access to the Treasury's Payments Systems that may undermine Social Security, Medicare, and veterans' benefits, and endanger the privacy of older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities.<sup>12</sup> The Treasury Department allowed representatives from the so-called "Department of Government Efficiency" to access the payments systems after that access was initially blocked by a career public servant.<sup>13</sup> The DOGE was established through executive order by President Trump, and its

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<sup>6</sup> *Supra*, note 1, Treasury Letter to Congress.

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Stein, "Musk Aides Gain Access to Sensitive Treasury Department Payment System, *Washington Post*, February 1, 2025, (hereinafter "*Washington Post* Payments Systems Article"), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/02/01/elon-musk-treasury-payments-system/>; Rebecca Kheel, "'Infinite Nightmares at Once': Veterans Data Swept Up in Musk's Takeover of Treasury System," *Military News*, February 4, 2025, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/02/04/infinite-nightmares-once-veterans-data-swept-musks-takeover-of-treasury-system.html>.

<sup>8</sup> "Fact Sheet: Social Security," Social Security Administration, last accessed January 30, 2025, <https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/factsheets/basicfact-alt.pdf>; "Veteran Beneficiaries, 2024," Social Security Administration, last updated November 2024, <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/population-profiles/veteran-beneficiaries.html>; "Monthly Statistical Snapshot, December 2024," Social Security Administration, last updated January 2025, [https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/stat\\_snapshot/](https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/stat_snapshot/).

<sup>9</sup> "Medicare Monthly Enrollment," Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, last updated December 27, 2024, <https://data.cms.gov/summary-statistics-on-beneficiary-enrollment/medicare-and-medicaid-reports/medicare-monthly-enrollment>.

<sup>10</sup> "VA has now granted benefits to 1.1 million Veterans and their survivors in fiscal year 2024, surpassing all-time record," Department of Veterans Affairs, July 23, 2024, <https://news.va.gov/press-room/va-has-now-granted-benefits-to-1-1-million-veterans-and-their-survivors-in-fiscal-year-2024-surpassing-all-time-records/>.

<sup>11</sup> Steve Inskeep, "Musk's DOGE Group Has Access to the Federal Payments System. What does that Mean?" *NPR Morning Edition*, February 4, 2025, (hereinafter "*Morning Edition* Payments Systems Segment"), <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/04/nx-s1-5285403/musks-doge-group-has-access-to-the-federal-payments-system-what-does-that-mean>.

<sup>12</sup> *Supra*, note 7, *Washington Post* Payments Systems Article.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Duehren, Maggie Haberman, Theodore Schleifer, and Alan Rappeport, "Elon Musk's Team Now Has Access to Treasury's Payments System," *New York Times*, February 1, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/01/us/politics/elon-musk-doge-federal-payments-system.html>.

unelected leadership aims to slash programs for Americans by 2 trillion dollars.<sup>14</sup> Access to the Treasury's Payments Systems could allow DOGE to pursue its goal by unilaterally ending payments for Social Security, Medicare, and veterans' benefits.<sup>15</sup> DOGE's access to the payments systems also allows the DOGE access to personal data, such as Social Security numbers and bank account information.<sup>16</sup> DOGE's access to that personal data is unacceptable in light of reports that one DOGE employee used a personal e-mail account to access a government call, and that another worked at a startup that hires convicted hackers.<sup>17</sup>

The United States Senate Special Committee on Aging (Aging Committee) studies "any and all matters pertaining to problems and opportunities of older people," including problems related to health, income, care, and assistance.<sup>18</sup> Further, nearly half of veterans are age 65 and older, and older adults are more likely to have a disability.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, the Aging Committee is concerned about the ability of the DOGE to unilaterally end Social Security, Medicare, and veterans' benefits. The Aging Committee is also concerned with the risk that DOGE's access to the Treasury's Payments Systems poses to the privacy of older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities. As Ranking Member of the Aging Committee, I ask you to respond, no later than February 28, 2025, to the following questions:

1. To what extent did the Treasury Department's political appointees consult with career Treasury Department employees before granting DOGE access to the Treasury's Payments Systems?
  - a. Please detail any concerns that career Treasury Department employees expressed about allowing access to the payments systems, including concerns about the impact on administration of Social Security, Medicare, and veterans' benefits, as well as the privacy of the recipients of those programs.
  - b. If the Treasury Department's political appointees did not consult with career Treasury Department employees before granting DOGE access to the Treasury's Payments Systems, please explain why.

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<sup>14</sup> "Establishing and Implementing the President's 'Department of Government Efficiency,'" White House, January 20, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/establishing-and-implementing-the-presidents-department-of-government-efficiency/>; Luis Melgar, Emma Kumer, and Jeff Stein, "DOGE Aims to Cut \$2 Trillion in Federal Spending. Where Would You Start?" *Washington Post*, February 6, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/interactive/2025/elon-musk-doge-government-budget-cuts-quiz/>.

<sup>15</sup> *Supra*, note 11, *Morning Edition* Payments Systems Segment.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> Zack Whittaker, "The Biggest Breach of US Government Data is Under Way," *TechCrunch*, February 7, 2025, <https://techcrunch.com/2025/02/05/the-biggest-breach-of-u-s-government-data-is-under-way/>; Andy Greenberg, David Gilbert, and Lily Hay Newman, "DOGE Teen Owns 'Tesla.Sexy LLC' and Worked at Startup that has Hired Convicted Hackers," *Wired*, February 6, 2025, <https://www.wired.com/story/edward-coristine-tesla-sexy-path-networks-doge/>.

<sup>18</sup> "Rules," Senate Special Committee on Aging, last accessed February 13, 2025, <https://www.aging.senate.gov/about/rules>.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Vespa, United States Census Bureau, *Aging Veterans: America's Veteran Population Later in Life*, July 2023, at 1, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2023/acs/acs-54.pdf>; "Disability and Health Data Now," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last updated December 18, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/articles-documents/disability-and-health-data-now.html>.

2. The Treasury Department claims that DOGE has “read only” access to the Treasury’s Payments Systems.<sup>20</sup> However, DOGE leadership boasted of shutting down certain government payments soon after the Treasury Department granted DOGE access.<sup>21</sup> Since then, a federal court has even weighed in on access by the DOGE, in response to a dispute over the level of access that DOGE actually has to the Treasury’s Payments Systems.<sup>22</sup> Please explain:
  - a. What specific steps the Treasury Department has taken to ensure that no DOGE employee can unilaterally shut down payments to Americans through Social Security, Medicare, or VA programs.
  - b. What steps the Treasury Department will immediately take to revoke DOGE’s access to the Treasury’s Payments Systems if the DOGE does unilaterally block payments through Social Security, Medicare, or VA benefits.
3. Please explain how activity by DOGE employees within the Treasury’s Payments Systems is being monitored, including how the Treasury Department is monitoring and recording:
  - a. Which DOGE employees access payment information for Social Security, Medicare, and veterans’ benefits.
  - b. Which individual payments through Social Security, Medicare, and veterans’ benefits have been accessed by DOGE employees.
  - c. What personally identifiable information related to the recipients of Social Security, Medicare, and veterans’ benefits has been accessed by DOGE employees.

If the Treasury Department is not monitoring and recording that type of DOGE activity within the Treasury’s Payments Systems, please explain why.

4. Please report on the number of times DOGE employees have accessed information on payments related to Social Security, Medicare, and veterans’ benefits. Please also include:
  - a. The number of times that DOGE employees have accessed Social Security, Medicare, and veterans’ benefits data that included personally identifiable information.
  - b. The number of times that DOGE employees have copied data related to Social Security, Medicare, and veterans’ benefits.
  - c. The number of times that DOGE employees have shared or saved copies of data related to Social Security, Medicare, and veterans’ benefits outside of the Treasury Department’s secure systems.

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<sup>20</sup> *Supra*, note 1, Treasury Letter to Congress.

<sup>21</sup> *Supra*, note 1, *Bloomberg* Federal Payments Article.

<sup>22</sup> Matt Bracken, “Federal Judge Partially Blocks DOGE’s Access to Treasury Financial Systems,” *FedScoop*, February 6, 2025, <https://fedscoop.com/judge-blocks-treasury-payments-systems-from-doge/>.

If the Treasury Department is not monitoring and recording that activity by DOGE employees, please explain why.

5. My constituents have expressed concerns about the access that the Treasury Department has granted the DOGE to federal payments. One constituent from Brooklyn wrote to me that Congress should “get Elon and his flunkies away from sensitive information in the Treasury. This is a crime.”<sup>23</sup> Another constituent, from Churchville, wrote that “we are all worried about our own accounts because [Elon Musk] has access to our personal information.”<sup>24</sup> Given those concerns, the Treasury Department’s leadership *must* make itself available to the public to explain its decision to grant DOGE access to the Treasury’s Payments Systems. The Treasury Department’s leadership must also explain directly to the public how the Treasury Department will protect personal data and preserve access to the programs that are critical for older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities.

How does the Treasury Department’s leadership plan to meet with the public, including older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities, regarding DOGE’s access to the Treasury’s Payments Systems? Please detail:

- a. The number of in-person and virtual meetings on this topic that Treasury Department leadership will conduct over the next three months, including planned dates, times, and locations of meetings, and leadership’s plans to answer questions from meeting participants. If Treasury Department leadership does not plan to hold public meetings on this topic or answer questions from the public, please explain why.
- b. The specific groups representing older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities that Treasury Department leadership will work with to organize meetings regarding DOGE’s access to the Treasury’s Payments Systems.
- c. The extent to which the Treasury Department will require DOGE employees and leadership to participate at in-person and virtual meetings and answer questions from older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities. If the Treasury Department will not require DOGE to participate in the meetings, please explain why.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you or your staff have questions, please contact Doug Hartman with my Aging Committee staff at 202-224-0185.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator  
Ranking Member, Special  
Committee on Aging

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<sup>23</sup> Constituent mail to Senator Kirsten Gillibrand from Brooklyn, New York.

<sup>24</sup> Constituent mail to Senator Kirsten Gillibrand from Churchville, New York.