

# U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY

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CHAIRMAN Special Committee on Aging

## Chairman Bob Casey's Opening Statement

### *“Keeping Our Promise to Older Adults and People with Disabilities: The Status of Social Security Today”*

Good morning, everybody. The Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order. The title of today's hearing is *Keeping Our Promise to Older Adults and People with Disabilities: The Status of Social Security Today*. Today, we will hear from Social Security Administration Commissioner, Martin O'Malley. We're grateful you're here. Commissioner O'Malley was confirmed in December of last year. I don't think I have to remind anyone in this room or listening how important this program called Social Security is.

Social Security will serve over 68 million Americans this year—the majority of whom are retired Americans and their families. Without Social Security benefits, experts estimate that about four in 10 older Americans would have incomes below the poverty line. That means millions of Americans, including nearly 640,000 Pennsylvanians, are lifted out of poverty because of Social Security.

Social Security also serves people with disabilities—in January of this year, Social Security provided almost \$12 billion in disability benefits to 8.5 million beneficiaries. Unfortunately, while our population has aged and the demand for Social Security has increased, support for the Social Security Administration has diminished greatly. As a result, the administration SSA has been drastically underfunded, creating some real challenges for the agency: from increased wait times for service and approval for disability benefits to overpayments and underpayments. And that's added tremendous pressure on the SSA workforce.

At the end of Fiscal Year 2022, the agency was at a 25-year staffing low, with a new low expected at the end of this fiscal year, and employees are being asked to take on more work of greater complexity. We should be working tirelessly to support SSA staff, including field office staff, for their dedication in an increasingly demanding environment. That means getting the training to do the job, and do the job well, and providing employees the support they need. To that end: Commissioner, I'll be sending you a letter today, along with Senator Fetterman, about

support for the SSA workforce, including some challenges that SSA employees in Pennsylvania have encountered in getting approval for reasonable accommodations.

Supporting the SSA workforce will also mean better supporting Social Security beneficiaries. Commissioner, I know that you in your first months on the job, you've focused your significant attention on hearing from SSA staff and stakeholders. And I'm eager to hear today about what you've learned. And I want to hear about your goals and your plans to bring about change at the Social Security Administration. However, without adequate funding—and legislative fixes—delivering on those goals and fixing existing problems will be difficult. As such, I will continue to push for robust funding for SSA—which will support investments in technology, hiring, and retention.

While we work to improve the benefit delivery process, it is critical that we increase Social Security benefits across the board. That's why I support efforts in the Senate that will increase benefits—like the repeal of the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset, which penalize workers who have dedicated their life to public service. I'm also pushing for the passage of my SWIFT Act, which would increase benefits for widows and widowers. In addition, today I am introducing the Boosting Benefits and COLAs for Seniors Act alongside Senators Blumenthal, Fetterman, Welch, Gillibrand, and Sanders. This legislation will change how Cost-of-Living Adjustments for Social Security benefits are calculated—ensuring that benefit adjustments are robust and reflective of the true costs incurred by older adults.

We must protect and strengthen Social Security, so that Americans of every generation can continue to access this essential lifeline. I look forward to working with Commissioner O'Malley to improve Social Security for all Americans. Now I will turn to Ranking Member Braun for his opening statement.