



Social Security Disability Claims Are Expected to Increase

Written On August 3, 2009 By [Bob Kraft](#)

The Social Security Administration will see a sharper increase in new disability claims than previously predicted. An aging population combined with a weak economy are big reasons why. It is estimated that there will possibly be 3.3 million new disability claims over the next year. This is an increase from previous estimates. For years the Social Security Administration has struggled managing the backlog of pending disability claims. The expected increase is expected to make that problem worse, and it is happening at a time when the agency was showing signs of catching up. The furlough of hundreds of state employees who process initial benefit claims also reduces the overall capacity to process pending claims. A few highlights of an [Associated Press article](#) are included below:

- Since October, the number of people waiting to have a claim processed has jumped a stunning 30 percent, from about 556,000 eight months ago to more than 736,000 in July.
- “We’re going to be moving backwards this year, the question is how much,” Social Security Commissioner Michael Astrue said in an interview. “The trend line isn’t good.”
- The Social Security Administration denies nearly two-thirds of initial claims, but claimants disputing a decision can appeal to an administrative law judge. That process is so cumbersome, nearly 750,000 people are waiting for a hearing. Some wait years to resolve their claim, but about 61 percent of those who appeal are ultimately approved for benefits.
- The economic stimulus package gave the agency \$500 million to help cut the appeals backlog. The agency is hiring hundreds more judges and staff to reduce the case load. The number of cases awaiting a hearing has gone down six months in a row.

Kraft & Associates
2777 Stemmons Freeway
Suite 1300
Dallas, Texas 75207
Toll Free: (800) 989-9999
FAX: (214) 637-2118
E-mail: info@kraftlaw.com

- Astrue had predicted earlier this year that the agency would cut the appeals backlog to normal levels by 2013 and says he remains confident of meeting that deadline. But the sharp rise in new claims may knock that schedule off track, especially if congressional funding doesn't keep pace with the increase.
- "The tsunami hasn't hit ... yet, but it will unfortunately," said Alan Cohen, senior budget adviser for the Senate Finance Committee, in remarks at a recent meeting of Social Security judges.