



Social Security Hearings Backlog Falls to Lowest Level Since 2005

Written On March 2, 2010 By [Bob Kraft](#)

That's the headline of a news release today from the Social Security Administration. I applaud the agency for making strides in reducing the inexcusable backlog and waiting times for Social Security disability decisions. I do have a concern though. Recently we have noticed that some of our clients' disability cases are being pulled, seemingly at random, from the normal process and having early decisions rendered. This is happening to maybe 20% of our cases.

While this is certainly good news for those clients fortunate enough to have their cases decided early, we can't figure out a pattern. That makes us wonder if perhaps some cases are pulled early just so the average processing time decreases. That's a cynical view to take, and I have no evidence this is actually happening. Still, it does make us wonder.

Here is the News Release:

Pending Cases Drop Below 700,000; Processing Time Down 72 Days

Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, today announced that the number of disability hearings pending stands at 697,437 cases — the lowest level since June 2005 and down more than 71,000 cases since December 2008, when the trend of month-by-month reductions began. In addition, the average processing time for hearing decisions has decreased to 442 days, down from a high of 514 days at the end of fiscal year (FY) 2008.

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“We have decreased the number of hearings pending by almost 10 percent over the last 14 months and cut the time it takes to make a decision by nearly two and a half months. This remarkable progress shows our backlog reduction plan is working,” Commissioner Astrue said. “With ongoing support from the President and Congress as well as the efforts of our hardworking employees, I am confident the hearings backlog will continue to diminish.”

Social Security has actively addressed the hearings backlog and increased the capacity to hold more hearings. The agency hired 147 Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) and over 1,000 support staff in FY 2009, and has plans to hire an additional 226 ALJs this year. The agency now has four National Hearing Centers to help process hearings by video conference for the most hard-hit areas of the country. The agency also has aggressive plans to open 14 new hearing offices and three satellite offices by the end of the year. The first of these offices was opened in Anchorage, Alaska on February 19, 2010.

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