

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 20, 2022

Dr. Kilolo Kijakazi
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, Maryland 21235

Dear Acting Commissioner Kijakazi:

We write to urge the Social Security Administration (SSA) to incorporate children in its current outreach efforts of individuals eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

As you may know, more than 11 million children in the United States live in poverty, or 16 percent of all children—roughly twice the poverty rate of working-age adults and seniors.¹ Black, American Indian and Alaska Natives children are more likely to have a disability than Non-Hispanic White children.² Additionally, 6.5% of children living in poverty have a disability, compared with 3.8% of children living above the Federal poverty line.³ Growing up in poverty has severe detrimental effects on children's lives in virtually every measurable category: physical and mental health;⁴ academic performance;⁵ employment and lifetime earnings;⁶ and delinquency.⁷ Further, it is more difficult for low-income families to care for a child with a disability, forcing parents to work part-time or leave the workforce altogether.

SSI benefits, while modest, can have a substantial impact in the lives of families of children with disabilities. In 2020, approximately 354,000 children were lifted out of poverty through SSI.⁸ Despite the rise in these indicators, the number of SSI awards for children have steadily declined over the past 10 years. Between 2010 and 2020, the number of SSI youth applications fell by 45% and the number of awards fell by 37% over the same period.⁹ Knowing the significant

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *The Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2020* (Sept 2021), accessible at <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-275.html>.

² U.S. Census Bureau, *Childhood Disability in the United States: 2019* (Mar 2021), Table 2, accessible at <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2021/acs/acsbr-006.pdf>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Levere, Michael et al., What is the Relationship Between Socioeconomic Deprivation and Child Supplemental Security Income Participation?*, Social Security Bulletin Vol. 82 No. 2 (2022), accessible at <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v82n2/ssb-v82n2.pdf>.

⁵ Engle, Patrice L. and Maureen M. Black, *The Effect of Poverty on Child Development and Educational Outcomes*, N.Y. Acad. Sci. Vol. 1136, No. 1 (June 2008), accessible at <https://doi.org/10.1196/annals.1425.023>

⁶ Chetty, Raj et al., *Childhood Environment and Gender Gaps in Adulthood*, Amer. Eco. Rev., Vol. 106, No. 5 (Jan. 2016), accessible at <https://www.nber.org/papers/w21936>.

⁷ Damron, Neil, *Poverty Fact Sheet: Life Beyond Bars: Children with an Incarcerated Parent*, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin at Madison (Nov. 2014), accessible at <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/factsheets/pdfs/Factsheet7-Incarceration.pdf>.

⁸ *Supra* note 1, Table 7.

⁹ Social Security Administration, *2021 SSI Annual Report*, Table IV.B1. (Oct. 2021), accessible at https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/ssir/SSI21/SingleYearTables/IV_B1.html; *Id.* At Table IV.B2,

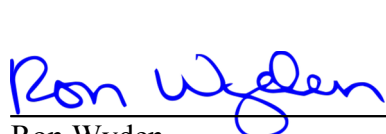
impact on children’s lives, Congress required SSA to “establish and conduct an ongoing program of outreach to children who are potentially eligible” for SSI disability.¹⁰

We share President Biden and SSA’s priority to advance equity throughout the Federal Government, particularly among underserved communities, by removing barriers and increasing access to federal programs and services.¹¹ We also appreciate the agency’s recent efforts to expand its outreach efforts to vulnerable populations such as those experiencing homelessness,¹² and committing to increase the number of SSI applications from underserved communities by 25 percent in Fiscal Year 2023.¹³ However, none of these programs directly target children with disabilities. These initiatives leverage existing community networks, but typically interact with a smaller subset of the larger population and may ultimately exclude those who would be eligible. So far, the only direct outreach efforts SSA has deployed are social media campaigns. Like many vulnerable groups, outreach to families of disabled children needs to be a multi-pronged effort and leverage federal and state data.

We understand there are initiatives that SSA is exploring, including leveraging existing Federal and State data to identify children who may be eligible for SSI benefits, such as State Medicaid data, SNAP and WIC enrollment, and other state-administered programs.

Within 60 days of receipt of this letter, we request a briefing from your office about SSA’s plans to target potentially eligible children through existing Federal and State data, as well as other outreach strategies SSA is exploring. It is imperative that SSA’s programs are equitably accessible to those who need assistance, and we stand committed to working with you to expand outreach make those connections.

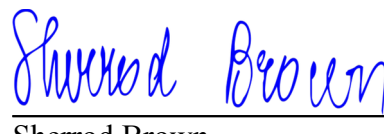
Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator
Chairman, Committee on
Finance



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator
Chairman, Special Committee
on Aging



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/ssir/SSI21/SingleYearTables/IV_B2.html

¹⁰ 42 U.S.C. §1383d (a).

¹¹ Executive Order 13985, *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*, E.O. 13985 of Jan 20, 2021, 86 FR 7009, accessible at

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/01/25/2021-01753/advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government>.

¹² Social Security Administration, *Annual Performance Report, Fiscal Years 2021-2023*, (Apr. 2022), accessible at <https://www.ssa.gov/budget/FY23Files/2023APR.pdf>;

¹³ Social Security Administration, *Fiscal Year 2023 President’s Budget*, accessible at <https://www.ssa.gov/budget/FY23Files/2023BO.pdf>.