



SOCIAL SECURITY

The Commissioner

June 6, 2006

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Becerra:

This is in response to your letter of May 17, 2006, which requested additional information in order to complete the hearing record for the May 11, 2006, hearing of the Subcommittee on Social Security of the Committee on Ways and Means concerning Social Security Service Delivery Challenges. Enclosed you will find the answers to your specific questions.

I want to thank you for bringing to our attention the issue of alerting potential disabled adult child beneficiaries to the availability of this benefit. Part of delivering high-quality service is informing the public about available benefits, and we are always seeking ways to improve how we communicate with potential beneficiaries.

As you suggest, we will explore the possibility of including information about childhood disability benefits in notices to Supplemental Security Income recipients and their representative payees. More immediately, we have made changes to our website so that disabled adult children and the people who are helping them can more easily see that these benefits are potentially available to them. We created on the front page of our website a new link entitled "Adults disabled before age 22" and added a new page to the website discussing these benefits. We also added a separate question about these benefits to our list of "frequently asked questions" about disability, which we also link to the new web page.

I hope this information is helpful. If I may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me, or your staff may contact Mr. Robert M. Wilson, Deputy Commissioner for Legislation and Congressional Affairs, at (202) 358-6030.

Sincerely,

Jo Anne B. Barnhart

Enclosure

As always, Thank you for your interest in improving service to the public.

cc: The Honorable Jim McCrery, Chairman, Subcommittee on Social Security

The Honorable Sander M. Levin, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Social Security

**Questions for the Record
on Disabled Adult Children (DAC)
for the May 11, 2006 Hearing on
Social Security Service Delivery Challenges**

- 1. How many DAC Beneficiaries are there? Could you provide subtotals according to the basis of their entitlement – i.e. by a parent’s retirement, disability or death? How many received SSI benefits prior to their DAC entitlement?**

As of December 2005, the numbers of childhood disability beneficiaries (also commonly referred to as DAC beneficiaries) by basis of entitlement were:

Total	768,535
Retired worker	191,979
Deceased worker	507,961
Disabled worker	68,595

Using a 10 percent sample as of December 2005, we estimate that approximately 448,530 of these DAC beneficiaries received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits prior to their DAC entitlement.

- 2. How does SSA ensure that potential DAC Beneficiaries, their parents or other guardians – as well as community organizations and others who work with them – are aware of the availability of this benefit? Please describe all outreach and information activities conducted by SSA to alert potential beneficiaries, their parents or other representatives (e.g. guardians, representative payees or trustees), and community organizations who work with this population.**

Social Security is very diligent in ensuring that claims technicians explore all possibilities for benefit entitlement. We ask on every claim (including all retirement, disability, lump sum death payment, and survivor claims) if there is any child over the age of 18 who has a disability that began before age 22 so that we can ensure that a Childhood Disability Benefit (CDB) claim is taken if appropriate. In addition, when a child attains age 18 in the Title XVI program, we redetermine the child’s eligibility under the adult disability criteria. During these interviews, we also explore entitlement to other benefits to which the individual may be entitled, including entitlement to CDB.

We also provide speakers nationwide, through a network of local offices, to conduct seminars for disability organizations, support groups, hospitals, and social workers interested in educating their members, their employees and their patients and families about Social Security’s disability programs. Social Security employs 1,300 field office managers and almost 150 full-time public affairs

specialists to educate Americans on Social Security programs. Each year, working in their local communities, these professionals deliver thousands of speeches, write numerous newspaper articles, and participate in countless radio and television interviews where they discuss all aspects of Social Security, including benefits provided through the program. Speakers can be requested either online at www.socialsecurity.gov/organizations or by contacting any local Social Security field office.

We participate in over 90 national conferences each year, providing attendees with information about the various programs administered by Social Security. This year Social Security will be attending over 50 conferences, at which we will be reaching out specifically to disability organizations and medical provider groups in an effort to educate and inform.

We actively partner with organizations, schools, and advocacy groups that work with the disabled community. We maintain these relationships by educating these various groups about our programs, including CDBs. As noted above, we do this by conducting seminars and workshops, writing articles for newsletters, and establishing partnerships. These partnerships allow us to spread the word about our disability programs and the work incentives for those already enrolled in our programs.

Additionally, we maintain informative pamphlets and brochures on our disability programs along with Medicare and Medicaid services. These are distributed to schools, centers for the developmentally disabled, and community centers, which are all places that disabled children and their families attend. We also maintain on our website extensive information on our programs and other help for students with disabilities. We are making changes to our website so that disabled adult children and the people who are helping them can more easily see that these benefits are potentially available to them. We created on the front page of our website a new link entitled "Adults disabled before age 22" and added a new page to the website discussing these benefits. We also have added a separate question about these benefits to our list of "frequently asked questions" about disability, which we also link to the new web page.

3. When a worker applies for Social Security retirement or disability benefits, or a spouse applies for survivors benefits, does SSA probe for whether there might be a potentially eligible DAC beneficiary? If so, is this true for all application settings – field office, telephone, and on-line? If not, why not?

When a worker or a spouse applies for any type of Social Security benefit, the question about children with disabilities is investigated with every claim. This is true for all application settings, either in the field office, telephone, or online. In fact, the interviewer or person filing on-line cannot continue through the path of a claim without answering this essential question.

- 4. When a disabled adult applies for SSI benefits, does SSA probe for whether he or she might be eligible for DAC benefits, either at that time or in the future? If the individual is not immediately eligible (because his or her parents are not retired, disabled, or deceased), is any kind of notation put on the file to flag for future DAC entitlement?**

The SSI application is also an application for any Title II benefit to which the applicant is eligible, including CDBs. Existing procedure specifically instructs SSI interviewers to investigate eligibility for such benefits. The SSI application also asks about other members of the household. This gives the interviewer the opportunity to explore leads for other benefits that could be available. If future entitlement is indicated, the interviewer can annotate the remarks portion of the application. These questions concerning children and children with disabilities will be addressed, in the future, in the event that the parent files for retirement or disability benefits, or if the parent dies. If the disabled adult remains eligible for SSI benefits, we will check potential eligibility for CDB during each SSI redetermination.

Social Security is currently working on systems enhancements that would collect and store parental information for disabled adults who became disabled prior to age 22. Using this information, the system would periodically interface with the Master Beneficiary Record and Social Security's death records to determine if the SSI recipient is eligible for CDB on the parent's record.

- 5. Can DAC benefits be applied for on-line? If not, please explain why.**

Childhood disability benefits cannot be applied for on-line. At the present time our on-line services do not include filing for survivor's or auxiliary child's benefits. Any claimant seeking benefits on a worker's record must establish his/her relationship to the worker. For some categories of children, dependency on the worker must also be proven. Both can be very complex and sensitive. In an in-person setting, a trained adjudicator using targeted lead and appropriate follow-up questions and explanations can elicit the necessary information. In the Internet self-help arena, all related information would need to be elicited through detailed questions and associated help screens. Our experience suggests that adjudicator recontact would be necessary to confirm the child's relationship in many cases, thus detracting from the purpose of the on-line application. However, we continue to evaluate the feasibility for including these types of claims on-line.

It should be noted that the disability report form, which is a critical part of the CDB application process, can be completed on-line by the beneficiary, his or her representative, or an organization, to be accessed by the claims technician and included with the claim. This facilitates the claims process for these applicants.

- 6. Has SSA undertaken any analysis aimed at determining whether all potentially eligible DAC beneficiaries are receiving benefits? If so, what are the results? If not, why not? Has SSA evaluated its outreach activities in order to assure that they are effective and that the DAC benefit is not underutilized? If so, are any additional steps planned to improve outreach?**

Social Security is always looking to improve our processes and outreach to ensure that disabled individuals receive all the benefits to which they are entitled. In fact, we have done some analysis on cases where some potentially eligible disabled individuals might have been entitled to CDBs. We are currently reviewing these cases to ensure that CDBs will be paid to these individuals, as appropriate.

Social Security has always had a forward-thinking approach about outreach efforts and activities. All Social Security regions have public affairs specialists who conduct numerous outreach activities with organizations committed to helping the disabled community, including disabled children. We are continually monitoring and evaluating our outreach activities so that we are responsive to the needs of the communities within each servicing field office. Additionally, all of these specialists attend annual conferences that offer training on a variety of topics specifically geared toward ensuring that they are providing essential Social Security program information to all the key organizations in their communities.

- 7. Could SSA and state-administered SSI supplementation programs provide written notices describing the DAC benefit, the grounds for eligibility and the application process to disabled minor and adult recipients of SSI and to appropriate third parties, such as parents, conservators, trustees and representative payees? Could such information be included with other notices or letters sent to disabled SSI recipients and their representatives? Based on your experience, would written notifications be an effective outreach tool?**

We will explore the possibility of including information about CDBs in notices to SSI recipients and their representative payees. The target group would be individuals disabled prior to age 22 who remain unmarried.

However, currently during the SSI application and redetermination process, Social Security does ask questions to determine if eligibility for other benefits exists. We also provide a written referral (Social Security Administration Supplemental Security Income Referral Notice for Social Security Benefits) when the SSI applicant is potentially eligible for Social Security benefits, including CDBs.

Additionally, we have numerous publications that provide information on all of our programs and their benefits. The 100-page booklet, "Understanding Supplemental Security Income," includes a chapter that provides information for

SSI applicants, beneficiaries, and their representatives about potential eligibility for Social Security benefits, including CDBs. The booklet is published in English and Spanish and is provided to other agencies, community organizations, and members of the public upon request. Social Security's publication, "Benefits for Children with Disabilities," is geared toward providing information to parents and caregivers of individuals who have been disabled since childhood. It helps individuals decide if their child, or someone they know, may be eligible for Social Security or SSI. There are links to both publications on Social Security's web site www.socialsecurity.gov.