

Human Resources/Social Security Subcommittee Joint Hearing on Work Incentives in Social Security Disability Programs

Committee on Ways and Means

September 23, 2011

(Remarks as Prepared)

“Chairman Johnson, thank you for calling this hearing today. ”

“Today we are examining some of the tools SSA has to assist disabled Americans who receive benefits but want to try to return to work. I hope this will be the starting point for moving legislation to continue the Social Security services that have allowed disabled Americans to live and work with dignity.”

“Let’s put things in perspective.”

“Social Security’s disability programs – Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) – are designed for people with severe work disabilities. In order to qualify, Americans must suffer from a medical condition so severe that, according to medical and vocational experts, it essentially prevents them from doing any work at all.”

“Most Americans receiving DI or SSI benefits are quite sick. About one of out every five men awarded DI benefits dies within 5 years of starting benefits, and about one in every 10 Americans awarded DI benefits suffers from cancer. Yet only the very sickest cancer patients qualify for benefits – in 2010, 1.6 million Americans were diagnosed with cancer, but fewer than ten percent of them were awarded DI benefits because they had cancer.”

“New beneficiaries are also likely to be older. Almost 6 out of every 10 Americans who are awarded benefits are 50 or older. □□

“Nevertheless, a small number of severely disabled Americans courageously manage to work despite very serious challenges, and many others want to try. We should encourage work whenever possible – such as by providing support to workers and employers – without punishing those who are truly unable to work. □

“This year’s budget cuts imposed on the Social Security Administration (SSA) – nearly a billion dollars below what SSA needs to do its job – will make it difficult for SSA to support Americans with disabilities who are trying to return to work.

“Americans who are attempting to work often need specialized help SSA can’t provide. Congress has authorized some small grants, paid out of SSA’s regular operating budget, to help these Americans secure the specialized support they need. We should do all we can to ensure that these services continue their successful record of helping disabled Americans return to work. Counselors funded through the

“Work Incentive Planning and Assistance” or WIPA [WHIP-uh] program help Americans understand and properly use the incentives offered by SSA that encourage the transition back to work. The “Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security” or PABSS program supports the efforts of disabled Americans to stay on the job – for

example, by helping them obtain necessary accommodations like assistive technology or adjusted work hours.

“Mr. Chairman, I hope that we can move quickly to extend and reauthorize these two important programs that result in more disabled Americans working with dignity. At the same time, we must be careful that we do not do anything that puts Americans with severe disabilities and illnesses in danger of losing benefits they paid for with their contributions and tax dollars.”