

United States Senate

January 6, 2017

The Honorable Carolyn Colvin
Acting Commissioner
U.S. Social Security Administration
1100 West High Rise
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Acting Commissioner Colvin:

I write concerning reports that Regional Chief Administrative Law Judge Nicholas LoBurgio has suspended all hearings for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) claims in the state of Montana until at least the summer of 2017 unless there is a dire need. The apparent reason for this is to reduce a backlog of Region 8 cases from Idaho, Salt Lake City, UT, and Pueblo, CO.

With 28 years' experience in business, I understand and applaud the goal of reducing backlog. However, the reduction of backlog for one group should not be entirely borne by another. Montanans are already waiting 14 months on average for a hearing with 4914 cases pending. An abrupt stoppage of hearings for Montana cases would immediately add an additional six months requiring two and one-half years to three years after initial application. This severely impacts the ability of the disabled to get timely answers on whether they are eligible for much-needed income. Not only would this have an immediate impact on the claimants, it would generate an additional backlog of Montana cases for Montana's Administrative Law Judges, further delaying a hearing.

Montanans deserve a timely hearing and a decision on their SSI and SSDI claims. While reducing backlog is an important goal, sacrificing the access of Montanans to appeals on their claims for this goal is an unacceptable solution. I urge you to find a more effective method for reducing the backlog that also fulfills the Social Security Administration's obligation to Montanans.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
U.S. Senator