



News Release

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security Holds Second Disability Hearing on Compassionate Allowances - Agreement with National Institutes of Health Announced

Experts Provide Testimony on Evaluating Cancers

The Social Security Administration held its second public hearing on compassionate allowances - a way to expedite the processing of disability claims for applicants whose medical conditions are so severe that their conditions obviously meet Social Security's standards. At the hearing, Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, announced that the agency had entered into a first-of-its-kind agreement with the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NIH will provide technical assistance to Social Security to help ensure that elements of the compassionate allowance initiative are based on sound, up-to-date medical science.

"The agreement with NIH is very exciting news," said Commissioner Astrue. "It represents an unprecedented level of cooperation between two of the nation's largest institutions serving people with disabilities."

The hearing, held today in Boston, featured some of the nation's leading oncology experts presenting testimony and sharing their views about the best ways to determine compassionate allowances for children and adults with cancers. Once implemented, Social Security can quickly target the most obviously disabled individuals for allowances based on confirmation of the diagnosis alone; for example, acute leukemia, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and pancreatic cancer. The agency plans to begin piloting compassionate allowances later this year and plans to hold two more public hearings on the initiative as well.

"It is a moral imperative to reduce the disability backlogs, which have caused an incredible hardship for applicants and their families," Commissioner Astrue said. "With the help of NIH, we are starting to bring our disability standards more in line with current medical and scientific standards. As a result, the most severe cases will be allowed much quicker and earlier in the process."

To learn more go to www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances for testimony from many of the cancer experts and to view a webcast of the hearing.

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