



News Release

SOCIAL SECURITY

Commissioner Astrue and Senator Bingaman Tour New National Hearing Center in Albuquerque

Additional Funding Allows Social Security to Hire More Staff and Open Another Office in Albuquerque area in 2010

Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, today joined U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) for a tour of the agency's new National Hearing Center (NHC) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. As a result of significant funding increases for Social Security over the past two years, the agency is able to open the NHC, as well as hire approximately 80 people for positions throughout New Mexico before the fiscal year ends in October. To further improve service to New Mexicans, Commissioner Astrue and Senator Bingaman also announced that Social Security plans to open an additional field office in the Albuquerque area in 2010.

"With Senator Bingaman's leadership, Social Security has received additional funding to hire and fill jobs in New Mexico and throughout the nation, as well as invest in technologies that improve service," Commissioner Astrue said. "This funding is crucial to our efforts to handle the increased workloads resulting from the economic downturn as well as the aging of the baby boom generation. Our employees are making positive strides toward driving down the hearing backlog and providing prompt service to the public. With sustained support, I am confident we can successfully address these challenges."

"Commissioner Astrue has been working very hard to address the backlog of Social Security cases, and New Mexicans are already seeing results," Senator Bingaman said. "I commend the Commissioner for his efforts, and will work to ensure he has the funding he needs to eliminate the backlog. With the opening of the National Hearing Center in Albuquerque and the new office in Rio Rancho next year, Social Security will be able to better serve local residents and those waiting for disability decisions around the country."

The Albuquerque NHC utilizes electronic video technology that enables Administrative Law Judges to hold disability hearings remotely throughout the country to reduce backlogs. Albuquerque initially will hear disability cases for Kansas City and Portland, Oregon -- two of the most backlogged offices in the U.S. Social Security's first NHC, located in Falls Church, Virginia, opened in December 2007 and has contributed to improved processing times in Atlanta, Georgia, Cleveland, Ohio and Flint, Michigan.

The agency is working with the General Services Administration on a location for a new field office in the Rio Rancho/north Albuquerque area to better serve the rapidly-growing population there. The new office is scheduled to open to the public in early 2010.

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