



# News Release

SOCIAL SECURITY

## Social Security Administration Attacks Disability Backlog

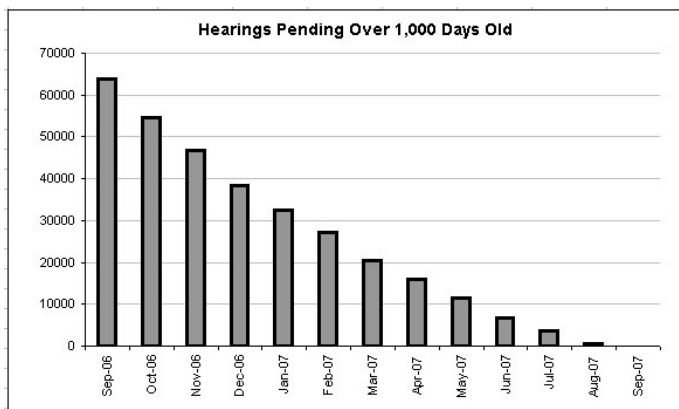
Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, today announced that the Social Security Administration had made progress in the 2007 fiscal year (FY) toward making faster decisions on disability claims.

“Better systems and business processes were essential to the progress we made in 2007,” Commissioner Astrue said, “but we cannot overlook the tens of thousands of overtime hours put in by the hardworking men and women of the Social Security Administration.”

Commissioner Astrue highlighted the progress made in a number of significant areas:

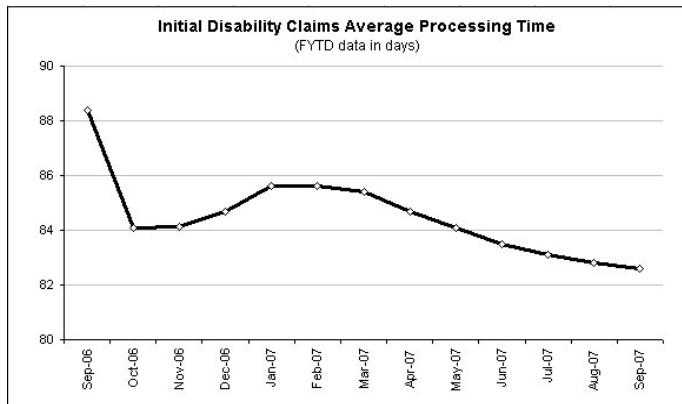
Social Security issued a final rule on September 5, 2007 extending nationwide its Quick Disability Determination (QDD) process. Under QDD, a predictive model analyzes specific elements of data within the electronic claims file to identify claims where there is a high potential that the claimant is disabled and where evidence of the person’s allegations can be quickly and easily obtained. In New England, where the process was being tested, about 3 percent of all new cases were identified as QDD cases and processed in an average of 11 days. Today, Arizona, New Jersey and North Dakota have started using QDD as part of a staged national roll-out that will be completed early next year.

The Social Security Administration also virtually eliminated its backlog of FY 2007 “aged” disability hearings cases. “Aged” cases, defined as cases pending 1,000 days or more, were reduced from 63,770 cases at the beginning of FY 2007 to 108 cases at the end of September.

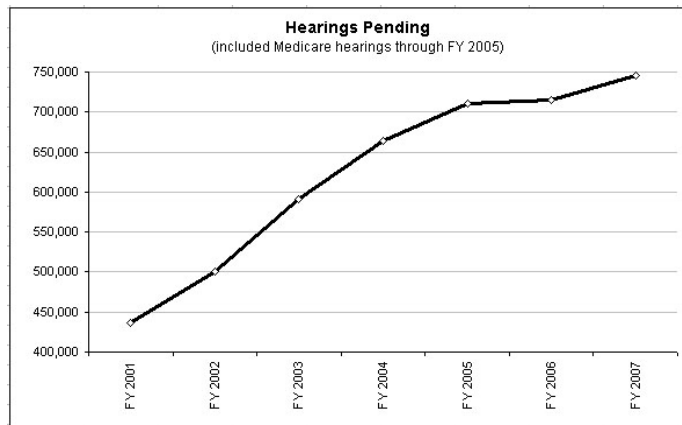


To build upon this progress, the agency will redefine “aged” cases as cases pending for at least 900 days and will again attempt to resolve all of these cases by the end of the fiscal year.

The time it takes to process initial disability claims declined 6.3 percent from 88.4 days in FY 2006 to 82.8 days in FY 2007.



Another accomplishment was that Social Security slowed the growth in its pending disability hearings cases by approximately fifty percent. While the overall number of cases pending at the hearing level increased from 715,568 cases to 746,744 cases, the increase of 31,176 cases was about half of the annual increase the agency has typically recorded in this decade.



As another key part of its plan, the Social Security Administration is establishing a National Hearing Center (NHC) so that a centralized cadre of Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) can use video hearing technology to hear cases in the most backlogged parts of the country. The technology now is in place, and the recruiting process for the first NHC judges has begun. The agency also plans to hire about 150 ALJs and some additional hearing office support staff in the spring of 2008 – the only new hiring in FY 2008 as the agency continues to contract through attrition due to many years of congressional budget cuts far below what the President has requested.

“Our goal is to build upon this year’s achievements and, with the support of Congress, continue to improve the service we provide to millions of disabled Americans,” said Commissioner Astrue. “Without adequate support from Congress, however, we will not be able to make further progress – and we may even lose ground.”

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