



SOCIAL SECURITY

The Commissioner

January 5, 2012

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Enclosed for consideration by the Congress is a draft bill to improve our work incentive provisions and extend the funding authority for two of our work incentive programs, the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program and the Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) program. I have also enclosed a more detailed description of the proposal.

The bill would expand WIPA—which we would rename the Work Incentives and Self-Sufficiency Education (WISE) program—to include planning and assistance for self-sufficiency and financial independence. It would also extend funding for five years for WISE and the PABSS programs. Additionally, the bill would eliminate the maximum (\$300,000) fiscal year cap on an entity's WISE funding.

The legislation establishing these programs initially authorized appropriations for five years, after which the Congress extended the appropriations authorizations for another five years. Recently, the Congress has authorized several one-year extensions, and the current authorization expired at the end of fiscal year 2011. We are requesting 5-year extensions as longer-term appropriations authorizations are vital to our continued successful planning and implementation of WISE and PABSS, which are integral parts of our employment and work incentive mission.

The Office of Management and Budget has advised that it has no objection to the transmittal of this proposed legislation to the Congress and that enactment would be consistent with the program of the President. We urge the Congress to give the draft bill prompt and favorable consideration.

I am sending an identical letter to the Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr., President of the Senate.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Astrue

Enclosures



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President of the Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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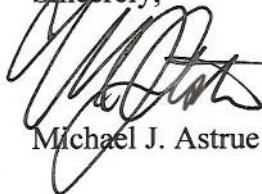
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Michael J. Astrue

Enclosures

Social Security Work Incentive Amendments of 2012

Expanding the Mandate for Planning, Assistance, and Outreach

Section 2 would expand the mandate for the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program (previously titled the Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach Program) to include self-sufficiency education, along with existing work incentives education, for the purpose of providing accurate information to disabled beneficiaries on work incentives programs and other strategies to improve their ability to obtain and maintain employment, self-sufficiency, and financial independence. The current WIPA program provides that services to disabled beneficiaries include information, guidance, and planning on the adequacy of health insurance benefits offered by an employer and other health benefits that may be available. This section would specify that such discussions will include Federal and State health benefits. By helping claimants leave the disability rolls and remain off cash benefits, the program would improve their economic security and allow them to enjoy a higher standard of living. We would revise the program title to the Work Incentives and Self-Sufficiency Education (WISE) program.

This section would also correct a technical drafting error and delete an obsolete reference to the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Advisory Panel that no longer exists.

Removing the Cap on Planning, Assistance, and Outreach Grants

Section 3 would remove the maximum \$300,000 fiscal year cap on an entity's WISE funding. Removing the cap on these grants would allow us to make bigger awards to larger, established entities. Under the current WIPA program, administrative costs absorb a great amount of a grantee's resources. Larger entities already have established infrastructures in place and, consequently, need to spend less on administrative overhead. The larger entities could use a greater proportion of funds for direct services to beneficiaries and would have greater flexibility over expenditures to ensure statewide coverage and programmatic quality.

Extension of Funding Authority for Certain Work Incentive Outreach and Assistance Programs

Section 4 would extend, for five years, funding authority for the WISE and the Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) programs. The current WIPA program consists of community-based organizations that receive grants from us to provide disability beneficiaries with free access to work incentives planning and assistance. We consider WIPA a strong support for our field offices, a key component of our national demonstration programs, and a critical service program at the State and local level for disability beneficiaries. The PABSS program (previously titled Protection and Advocacy Systems) provides return-to-work supports and advocacy services to disability beneficiaries via State protection and advocacy systems. These services are also integral to our return-to-work efforts. We anticipate a continuing need and increased demand for WISE and PABSS services.

Annual appropriations fund these programs, and the authorizations of appropriations contained in sections 1149 and 1150 of the *Social Security Act* expire at the end of fiscal year (FY) 2011. (Sections 1149 and 1150, added by the *Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999*, initially authorized appropriations for the programs for each fiscal year through FY 2004. The *Social Security Protection Act of 2004* amended these sections to extend the appropriations authorizations through FY 2009. The *WIPA and PABSS Reauthorization Act of 2009* extended these authorizations for another year, and the *WIPA and PABSS Extension Act of 2010* extended these programs through FY 2011.)

The proposed changes would be effective upon enactment.

A B I L L

To amend the Social Security Act to make various improvements in the disability insurance program and the supplemental security income program and to extend various provisions.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SEC. 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Social Security Work Incentive Amendments of 2012".

SEC. 2. EXPANDING THE MANDATE FOR PLANNING, ASSISTANCE, AND OUTREACH.

Section 1149 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1320b-20) is amended—

(a) in subsection (a)(1) by striking ", in consultation with the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Advisory Panel established under section 101(f) of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, shall establish a community-based work incentives planning and assistance program for the purpose of disseminating accurate information to disabled beneficiaries on work incentives programs and issues related to such programs" and inserting "shall establish a community-based work incentives and self-sufficiency education program for the purpose of disseminating accurate information to disabled beneficiaries on work incentives programs and other

strategies to improve their ability to obtain and maintain employment, self-sufficiency, and financial independence”;

(b) in subsection (a)(2)(A) by striking “benefits planning” and inserting “work incentives, self-sufficiency, and financial independence planning”;

(c) in subsection (a)(2)(D)(i) by striking “planning” and inserting “work incentives, self-sufficiency, and financial independence planning and”;

(d) in subsection (a)(3) by striking “benefits” and inserting “work incentives, self-sufficiency, or financial independence”;

(e) in subsection (b)(1)(C)(i) by inserting a closing parenthesis after “Field Offices” and striking the closing parenthesis at the end of clause (i);

(f) in subsection (b)(2) by --

(1) in the part before subparagraph A, by striking “benefits” and inserting “work incentives, self-sufficiency, and financial independence”;

(2) in subparagraph (B), by inserting “the State or Federal government or by” after “by” and striking “and” at the end;

(3) redesignating subparagraph (C) as subparagraph (D); and

(4) by inserting after subparagraph (B), the following:

“(C) strategies and resources that employed individuals with disabilities may be able to take advantage of to maintain employment, improve their self-sufficiency, and

reduce or eliminate their dependence on cash benefits;
and”;

(g) in subsection (b)(4)(B) by striking “benefits” and inserting “work incentives, self-sufficiency, and financial independence”; and

(h) in subsection (c) by striking “benefits” and inserting “work incentives, self-sufficiency, and financial independence”.

SEC. 3. REMOVING THE CAP ON PLANNING, ASSISTANCE, AND
OUTREACH GRANTS.

Section 1149(b)(3)(B) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1320b-20(b)(3)(B)) is amended by striking “or more than \$300,000.”

SEC. 4. EXTENSION OF FUNDING AUTHORITY FOR CERTAIN WORK
INCENTIVE OUTREACH AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

(a) PLANNING, ASSISTANCE, AND OUTREACH—Section 1149(e) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1320b-20) is amended by striking “2011” and inserting “2016.”

(b) PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY—Section 1150(h) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1320b-21(h)) is amended by striking “2011” and inserting “2016.”