

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 13, 2012

The Honorable Michael J. Astrue
Commissioner of Social Security
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Commissioner Astrue:

We write regarding the Social Security Administration's (SSA) plan to close the Ketchikan SSA office, the only SSA office serving the southern region of Southeast Alaska, on September 30, 2012. While we understand the need to examine every federal expenditure in our nation's current fiscal environment and SSA's need to reduce its costs and improve its operational efficiency, we have concerns about this proposal for a community off the road system and the surrounding areas this office serves.

We are told this plan is projected to save \$100,000 annually. With such limited savings, we question whether the closure of the Ketchikan office is the most effective course of action or whether other measures may save similar amounts without negatively impacting Alaskans. To that end, we urge you to consider all feasible alternatives to closing this office. Moreover, we believe a contingency plan is necessary to ensure service delivery is not interrupted for SSA customers and the residents of southern Southeast Alaska are not negatively impacted if this proposal goes forward. Although some SSA services are accessible via the internet and phone, some individuals may lack access to such resources. Other SSA services may require in-person meetings, and we do not believe people in southern Southeast Alaska who need such services should have to fly to other parts of Alaska for federal assistance.

The SSA must consider all options to avoid negatively impacting Ketchikan and surrounding communities, such as maintaining the existing office, sharing an employee with another federal agency in shared federal space, sending an SSA employee to Ketchikan for regular office hours in an existing federal building, and establishing a virtual SSA capability in Ketchikan so that individuals can have a face-to-face conversation with SSA employees when necessary.

We would also appreciate a detailed accounting of the sources of the \$100,000 in savings associated with the proposed Ketchikan closure and a cost/benefit analysis of those savings, as well as the percentage of the field office funded by Labor and Administrative Expenses and the percentage funded by the Social Security Trust Fund. Moreover, we would appreciate a list of all other field offices proposed for closure across the country, an accounting of the amount expected to be saved from each

closure, and a cost/benefit analysis of those savings; SSA's overall plan to reduce costs in the coming years; and the percentage of cost savings attributed to the closure of field offices. Lastly, we would appreciate the number of visits to the Ketchikan SSA office for each of the last 10 years.

We are ready and willing to work with the SSA in any way possible to avoid negatively impacting Ketchikan or other parts of Alaska. We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,


Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate


Mark Begich
United States Senate


Don Young
Congressman for All Alaska