



News Release

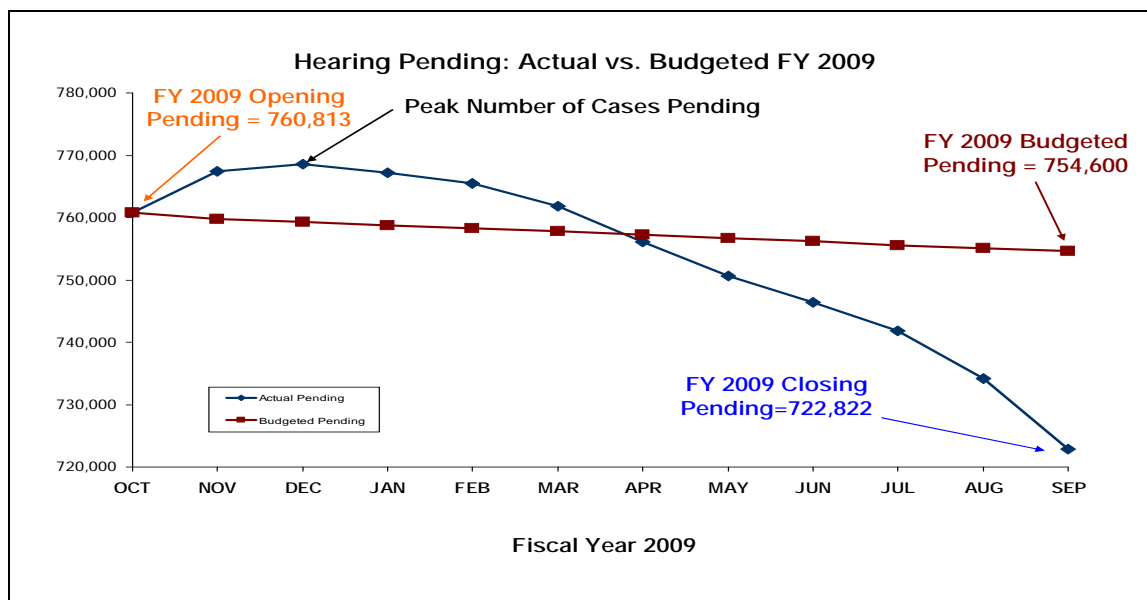
SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security Hearings Backlog Down for First Time in Decade

Productivity and Processing Times Also Improve

Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, today announced that for the first time since 1999, the agency has ended the year with fewer disability hearings pending than in the prior year. Social Security ended fiscal year (FY) 2009 with 722,822 hearings pending compared to 760,813 hearings pending at the start of the year, a reduction of more than 37,000 cases. Over the same period, the average processing time for these cases improved from 514 days in FY 2008 to 491 in FY 2009.

“Our backlog reduction plan is working, and progress is accelerating,” Commissioner Astrue said. “Even in the face of a significant increase in our workloads as a result of the worst recession since the Great Depression, we have reduced the hearings backlog for nine consecutive months. Thanks to the efforts of thousands of hardworking Social Security employees and the additional funding we received from President Obama and the Congress, we have exceeded our backlog reduction goal for this year.”



To achieve its backlog reduction goals, the agency has embarked on the largest expansion in decades of its capacity to hear disability appeals. This year, the agency hired 147 new

Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) and 850 support staff and plans to hire 226 additional ALJs plus support staff in FY 2010. To provide flexibility to assist the most backlogged hearing offices, the agency opened three new National Hearing Centers (NHCs) in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Baltimore, Maryland; and Chicago, Illinois. The agency also has aggressive plans to open 14 new hearing offices and 4 satellite offices by the end of next year with the first of those new offices opening in Anchorage, Alaska in the next few months.

In addition to reducing the number of cases awaiting a hearing decision, the agency again targeted the oldest and most difficult cases for processing. Beginning in FY 2007 with 65,000 cases that were 1,000 days old or older, the agency has continually attacked its “aged” cases. This year, the agency targeted 166,838 cases that were 850 days or older and virtually eliminated this entire universe of cases. The goal in FY 2010 has been reset again to eliminate cases over 825 days old.

Social Security’s ALJs also continue to increase their productivity. The agency averaged 570 dispositions (2.28 per day) per available ALJ in FY 2009, an upward trend that has continued for the last three years.

For more information about Social Security’s hearings process and backlog reduction initiatives, go to www.socialsecurity.gov/appeals.

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