

August 27, 2010

For immediate release

Contact: Jamie Horwitz 202/549-4921, jhdcp@starpower.net
Roger Kerson, 202/315.8533, roger.kerson@gmail.com
Sara Norman, (202)577-8714 norman.sl@gmail.com

Federal Judges to Discuss Growing Personal Threats and Security Concerns at National Press Club Newsmaker Event, 10 a.m., Monday, August 30th

WASHINGTON – On Monday, two federal judges will detail threats and attacks on federal administrative law judges and describe lax security conditions as well as make recommendations on how to better protect judges.

Attacks on federal workers have increased over the past year, with high-profile incidents at the Pentagon, an IRS building in Texas and a federal building in Las Vegas. Threats on judicial employees have become so commonplace that the U.S. Marshals Service has opened a clearinghouse to deal with these threats. Between March and August of last year, 28 threats were recorded on Social Security offices that handle disability hearings and in the same period 10 individual judges who hear disability claims were threatened. Threats to the wives and children of judges also have been reported. In January, a gunman, possibly upset about a reduction in his Social Security benefits, killed a U.S. courthouse security guard and injured a deputy marshal in Las Vegas.

WHO: Hon. Randall Frye, Pres. Of the Assn. of Administrative Law Judges and a federal judge with the Social Security Administration based in Charlotte, N.C. and the Hon. Dana Leigh Marks, Pres. of the National Assn. of Immigration Judges and a federal immigration judge in the Department of Justice based in San Francisco

WHAT: National Press Club Newsmaker press conference and release of new data on threats and attacks directed at federal Social Security and Immigration administrative law judges

WHEN/WHERE: Monday, August 30, at 10 a.m., in the Zenger Room of the National Press Club, 13th Floor, National Press Building, 529 14th St., N.W., Washington, D.C.

Judges have reported chairs being thrown at them, their robes being grabbed while on the bench and one respondent in an Immigration hearing reportedly attempted suicide in front of the judge. Complicating matters and increasing security risks is the fact that most Social Security and Immigration judges do not have a bailiff or a security guard in their courtrooms and many of these facilities are only protected by private security guards. A large number of these courtrooms are now located in leased office space rather than government buildings.

Claimants and respondents appearing before these judges face tremendous consequences from decisions rendered. The average lifetime payout of a Social Security disability claim is roughly \$250,000; in contrast, many of those who are denied become impoverished or homeless. Immigration judges can banish long-term residents or remove people who fear persecution in their homelands. They routinely handle cases where an applicant has a criminal record, a history of mental or competency issues or has been the victim of domestic violence. Nationwide, the majority of the respondents in Immigration proceedings are not represented by counsel.

The backlog for hearing dates in both courts can stretch two years or longer.

In addition to releasing new data and describing the working conditions in these courts at Monday's Newsmaker, judges will make recommendations on how to improve security for administrative law judges.