

ASSOCIATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES
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October 10, 2008

The Honorable Frank Cristaudo
Chief Administrative Law Judge
Office of Disability Adjudication and Review
5107 Leesburg Pike, STE 1608
Falls Church, VA 22041

Re: ALJ File Folder

Dear Chief Judge Cristaudo:

Several weeks ago, the Association of Administrative Law Judges (AALJ) learned that the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) is considering discontinuing the use of paper ALJ folders (ALJ Folder) designated for use by administrative law judges (ALJs) when processing cases. This decision was confirmed by ODAR representatives at the recent ODAR-AALJ Labor Management Committee (LMC) meeting (September 10 & 11, 2008) in Falls Church, VA.

As the representative for the SSA judges, I ask and encourage you to recommend and actively support the retention of the ALJ Folder.

An ALJ folder is an invaluable administrative tool for judges. The cover sheet that is prepared for the ALJ folder is typically accurate and quickly provides important information to include the claimant's name, social security number, date of birth and address. It also includes the type of claim, filing information, date last insured and scheduling information. The cover sheet, when fully completed, provides other information such as vocational information and nature of alleged impairments. Paper documents are placed inside this folder to include ALJ work product that typically includes pre-hearing, hearing and post-hearing notes, intra-office communiqué and other paper documents that provide a completed picture of the case.

While AALJ has not formally polled its membership regarding the value of the ALJ folder, informal surveys and comments clearly indicate that it is a valuable, if not indispensable, tool used by both ALJs and Management in processing cases. We have further observed that some offices have retained the use of ALJ folders notwithstanding whatever directive may have been issued regarding discontinuation of use. Hearing Office Management who have retained use find that the ALJ folder serves as a repository for pertinent paper documents that cannot be readily or economically electronically replicated but have historical significance to case adjudication.

AALJ has fully supported the Social Security Administration in its electronic initiatives and movement to paperless files. Indeed, AALJ has made many recommendations, through the Joint Technology Committee, Bargaining Committee and among others, that have been practical, reasonable and essential in converting to electronic folders. This recommendation is practical, reasonable and essential and will truly facilitate and enhance ALJs' efficiency and effectiveness.

I thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration of this request and for your active support in making the ALJ folder a required document in each hearing office.

Should you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Ronald G. Bernoski
President