

Larson Opposes Politicization of Social Security Judges

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Press Release



WASHINGTON, DC – Rep. John Larson, Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Social Security, released the following statement in response to President Donald Trump’s [executive order](#) that allows the President to appoint federal Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) on the basis of ideology and political orientation, rather than through a competitive examination process based on merit, neutrality, and fitness for office. The Social Security Administration employs the vast majority of federal ALJs, who issued over 685,000 benefit-eligibility decisions last year.

“This new executive order is harmful to the millions of Americans who can no longer work due to a severe disability and have been waiting years for a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ). Americans contribute to Social Security throughout their working lives, and they deserve an impartial hearing by a highly-qualified, independent judge. But under the Administration’s new policy, they will face a judge beholden to ideology and politics rather than one selected through a competitive process designed to ensure qualification and neutrality. The hard-earned benefits of millions of workers and their families are now at risk. I call upon the Administration to reverse this dangerous decision.

Background:

The federal government employs over 1,900 ALJs, and 85 percent of them serve at the Social Security Administration (SSA). At SSA, ALJs hear appeals from workers who have applied for their earned benefits, but whose applications were rejected by a lower-level decisionmaker at SSA. In almost half of cases, the ALJ determines that the previous denial of benefits was incorrect and that the worker meets the eligibility criteria in the law. About one-quarter of disabled workers receiving Social Security benefits are able to receive their earned benefit because of an ALJ decision.

Prior to the imposition of the Executive Order, ALJs were insulated from political pressure to award or deny benefits because they were appointed under longstanding statutory and regulatory protections which ensured that ALJs were hired on a competitive basis according to qualification and impartiality, rather than selected by political