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July 28, 2015

Carolyn W. Colvin
Commissioner
U.S. Social Security Administration
2041 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE
Washington DC, 20020

Dear Commissioner Colvin,

After receiving numerous complaints about the Albuquerque, New Mexico Social Security Office (Albuquerque SSO), on July 6, 2015, I made a surprise visit and found unacceptable conditions and service. Since then, I have received over 1,200 comments online, over the phone, and in person from constituents about their concerns, not only about the poor level of service at the Albuquerque SSO, but also about SSA's plans to move the Albuquerque SSO from its current location on Cutler Avenue to the Albuquerque Teleservice Center (TSC) located downtown.

On July 9, 2015, I communicated these concerns directly to Sheila Everett, the Dallas Regional Commissioner and toured the TSC on July 20, 2015. Due to inaction by SSA and after soliciting stakeholder feedback, which in several cases contradicted information provided by SSA, I continue to have serious concerns with the level of service at the Albuquerque SSO and SSA's planned move. I understand and support SSA's goal to carefully manage taxpayer dollars, but this must not come at the expense of SSA's mission, which is to deliver Social Security services that meet the needs of the public. Due to the concerns my constituents have raised and my office has identified, I urge you to suspend your planned move to the Downtown TSC Office.

Albuquerque SSO

Waiting Outside

When I arrived at the Albuquerque SSO at 7:00 AM, there were already approximately 100 people waiting in line outside the office, which opens at 9:00 AM. These people, including the disabled and elderly, were standing outside in the heat without shade or anywhere to sit. After I asked SSA to provide shade, benches, or chairs, SSA told me that it asked the General

Services Administration (GSA) to discuss with the lessor the feasibility of providing these accommodations to visitors waiting outside the building. However, to date, the lessor has not had any contact with SSA or GSA regarding this request, and I remain disturbed about the lack of action by SSA and GSA in resolving this matter.

Security

I have heard numerous complaints of rude, unprofessional, and inappropriate behavior from the security guards at the Albuquerque SSO. I understand the need to screen visitors at the Albuquerque SSO and create a safe environment for SSA staff and the public alike. However, SSA must treat all visitors with the dignity and respect that they deserve. By helping to create a pleasant experience, security guards can assist Albuquerque SSO staff to quickly manage and resolve their cases.

SSA stated that they are not aware of any complaints regarding the security guards at the SSA building. Does the Albuquerque SSO provide visitors with an anonymous survey to get feedback on security guard behavior? If not, why not, and will SSA consider providing such a survey to visitors at the Albuquerque SSO? Lastly, I appreciate SSA's offer to open the lobby earlier to allow security checks to take place so fewer people have to wait outside in the heat. Please confirm that SSA is opening the lobby earlier, what time this will occur daily, and if this practice will continue at the Downtown TSC Office.

SSA's Planned Move

Parking at the Downtown TSC Office

Public parking at the Downtown TSC Office is very limited and not suitable for a busy SSA Field Office. Public parking, both street and parking lot, is regularly utilized by residents, visitors, and employees of the downtown area. There are inaccuracies in the parking analysis that SSA provided my office, including parking spaces that SSA double counted and that do not exist. My staff is happy to review these issues with your office so SSA fully understands the parking limitations within a two block radius of the Downtown TSC Office.

In addition, the move will force visitors to start paying for parking. This cost is burdensome to many no-income or low-income individuals who often must make multiple trips to the SSA office. Given that SSA refuses to validate visitor parking, your planned move will impose new expenses on many people who live at or near the poverty line. That is why I was so surprised that SSA staff offered to pay for my parking when I visited the Downtown TSC Office. What actions will SSA take, if any, to increase public parking availability and reduce costs for claimants and beneficiaries?

I am concerned about the ability of disabled individuals to access the Downtown TSC Office. There is no disabled public parking within a two-block radius of the Downtown TSC Office and there is no disabled drop-off zone next to the building. Given that Social Security claimants and beneficiaries are often disabled, the lack of safe, disabled parking or a drop-off zone, creates accessibility issues and safety risks for individuals with limited mobility. I am concerned that people may park illegally to drop off the disabled or wheel-chair bound close to the Downtown TSC Office, which could lead to accidents. I request that SSA construct a secure drop-off zone for the disabled.

Outreach

During my visit to the Downtown TSC Office, I inquired about what SSA did to reach out and notify the community regarding its planned move. The Regional Communications Director, Sarah Shultz-Lackey, told me that prior to my visit, SSA had notified 30 media outlets in New Mexico and 80 third-party organizations, such as attorneys, homeless shelters, and senior centers. She stated that every one of them had received an official call, an electronic message, and a letter directly from SSA and that staff had personally visited organizations in Albuquerque about the move.

My office reached out to 21 homeless shelters, senior centers, and veteran service organizations, but only one of the organizations—the New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness—indicated that they were notified from SSA regarding the planned move. The list of organizations we contacted is attached. Many organizations were unaware and surprised by the change in location and asked our office for more information. I request that SSA provides my office with a list of all New Mexico organizations that it notified prior to July 20, 2015 as well as a list of organizations that confirmed receipt. Lastly, how will SSA notify individuals who show up at the old location that the office has moved to the Downtown TSC Office? My office remains available to assist SSA to identify key stakeholders that should be notified about SSA's move.

As mentioned above, given the serious issues about parking, disability access, and outreach, I request that SSA suspends its planned move to the Downtown TSC Office until it reviews the concerns discussed in this letter. I do not believe that the Downtown TSC Office meets the needs of the Albuquerque community, including many who are low-income, elderly, or disabled.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to SSA improving the quality of service in the 1st Congressional District of New Mexico. If you have any questions, you may contact my Chief of Staff, Dominic Gabello, at 202-225-6316.

Sincerely,



Michelle Lujan Grisham

Member of Congress

Enclosure (1)

- List of organizations which were not notified by SSA about the Albuquerque SSO move.

cc:

Sheila Everett
Regional Commissioner
Social Security Administration

List of Organizations Not Notified by SSA

- City of Albuquerque Senior Affairs
- Barelas Senior Center
- Bear Canyon Senior Center
- Highland Senior Center
- Los Volcanes Senior Center
- Albuquerque Health Care for the Homeless
- Senior Citizen Law Center
- Marine Corps League
- Concern Veterans of America
- Henderson House/YWCA
- Crossroads for Women
- Joy Junction
- Albuquerque Indian Center
- God's Warehouse
- Veterans Integration Center
- South Valley Multi-Purpose Center
- Manzano Mesa
- SAFE House
- St. Martin's Hospitality Center
- First Choice