



CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

STATEMENT BY

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GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE SOCIAL SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE ON**

ON

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL SECURITY'S CUSTOMER SERVICE

MAY 17, 2022



Chairman Larson and Members of the Social Security Subcommittee:

On behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE) which represents over 700,000 federal employees at over 70 different agencies, including approximately 43,000 employees at the Social Security Administration (SSA), I thank you for holding this important hearing on improving Social Security's customer service.

In order to accomplish and maintain excellent customer service, AFGE makes two fundamental recommendations to this Committee. First, Congress should adequately fund SSA, starting with appropriation of \$16.1 billion in Fiscal Year 2023. Second, Congress should use its funding, legislative, and oversight powers to ensure that SSA gives its frontline employees a voice and works with them to improve and sustain customer service.

SSA's workers are on the front lines in serving the public and helping them get their benefits. Unfortunately, due to underfunding and dismal labor relations, morale among this workforce is very low. Workers face exhaustion from extreme workloads and are disillusioned with a hostile management that ignores their workplace concerns. Numerous government employee satisfaction surveys have found SSA to be among the worst federal agencies to work for. Attached to this submission we highlight some results from the most recent survey, the third government-wide "Employee Voice" pulse survey. Out of 25 federal agencies surveyed, SSA consistently ranked at or near the bottom. This has made recruitment and retention very difficult, and it follows that employee satisfaction affects customer service. To achieve sustained improvement in customer service, it will be critical to restore morale and dedicate resources to recruitment and retention of SSA workers.

Congress should appropriate \$16.1 billion in FY 23. The SSA has faced years of underfunding. The agency's administrative funding for basic operations fell by more than 14 percent from 2010 to 2022, after accounting for inflation. From 2010 to 2021, SSA's workforce was reduced by approximately 8,500 full-time, permanent workers or 1 in 8 employees and 67 field offices have closed. Meanwhile, the workload is set to increase as nearly twenty million Americans reach retirement age over the next decade. While SSA received a modest funding bump in real dollars for FY 22, the increase failed to keep up with inflation. \$16.1 billion in FY 23 funding is needed for the agency to begin to strengthen its workforce, update its computer systems and improve its customer service.

Additional funding would help SSA keep open field offices in communities that need them. It could allow for effective recruitment, relocation, and retention flexibilities and incentives. It could allow SSA to begin to update its antiquated computer systems and to again mail out earnings statements to every American. Additionally, SSA is currently one of the only federal agencies to lack a student loan repayment program. For around \$8 million a year, SSA could begin to bring its benefits in line with other federal agencies. Legal Assistants support the hearings and work of Administrative Law Judges, but many have been forced to perform duties beyond their grade. Increased funding could allow SSA to ensure Legal Assistants are correctly classified for the work they do.

Congress should also use its funding, legislative and oversight powers to ensure that SSA gives its frontline employees a voice and works with them to improve customer service.

SSA should reopen its contract, which was forced on the workers without input under the previous commissioner, and bargain in good faith with its employees. Utilizing telework would not only improve worker morale, recruitment and retention, but it also increases productivity and keeps vulnerable elderly and disabled safer as the Covid-19 pandemic continues. Additionally, creating a national level union-management workgroup could help foster better labor relations. Problems with reopening the collective bargaining contract and ongoing labor-management issues require regular inquiry and oversight from Congress.

Thank you for hosting this hearing on improving Social Security's customer service. We look forward to working with the Committee to achieve this important goal and address underlying issues that present opportunities for improvement. If you have further questions about any of these issues, please contact Jeff Cruz at jeff.cruz@afge.org.

Sincerely,

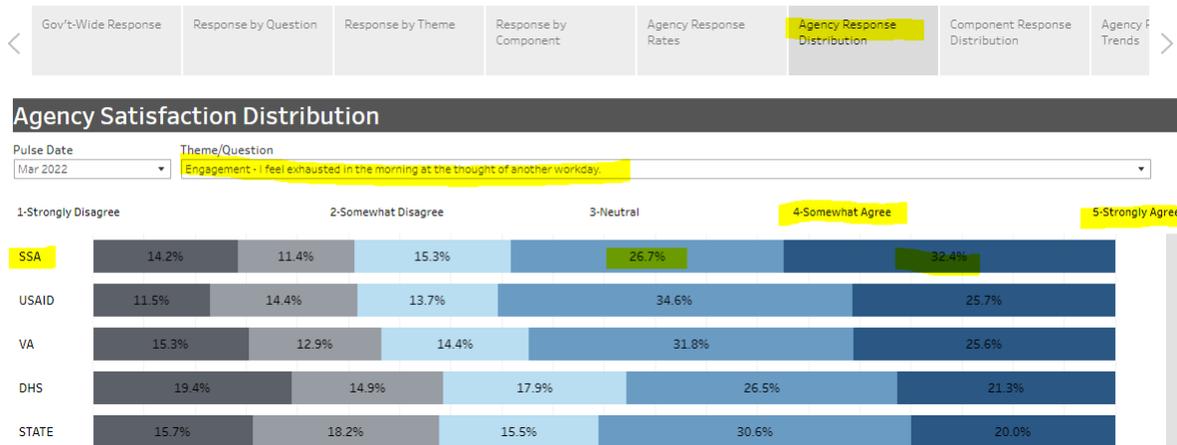


Julie N. Tippens
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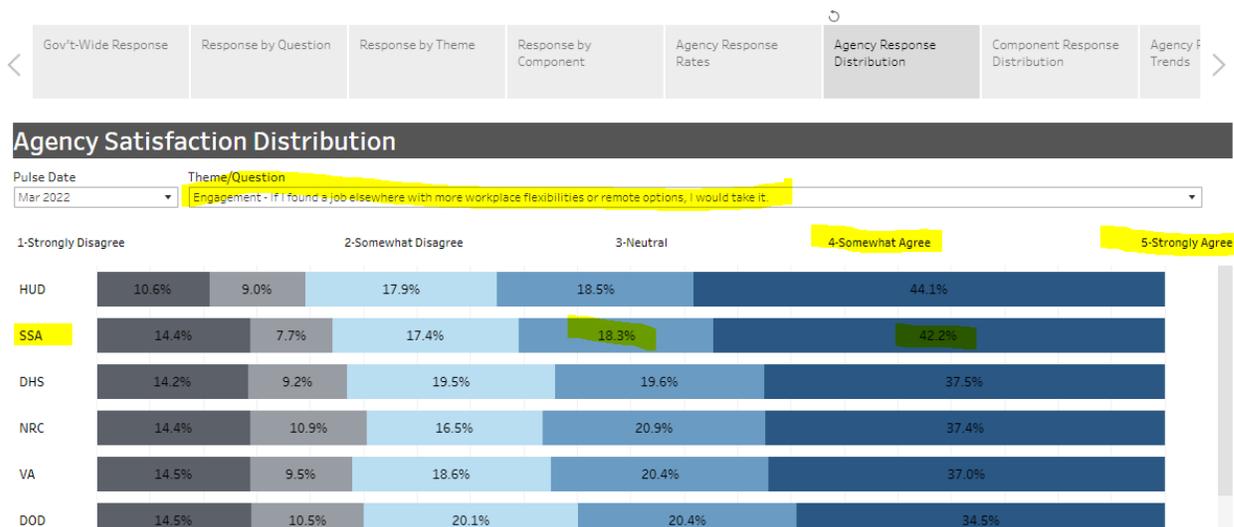
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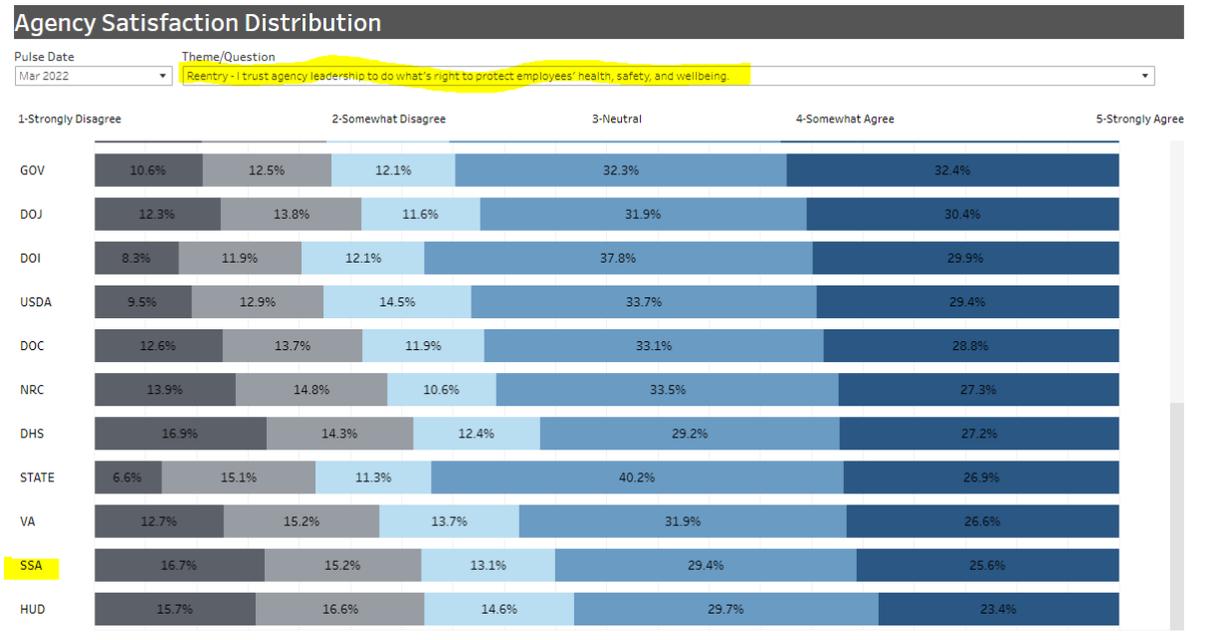
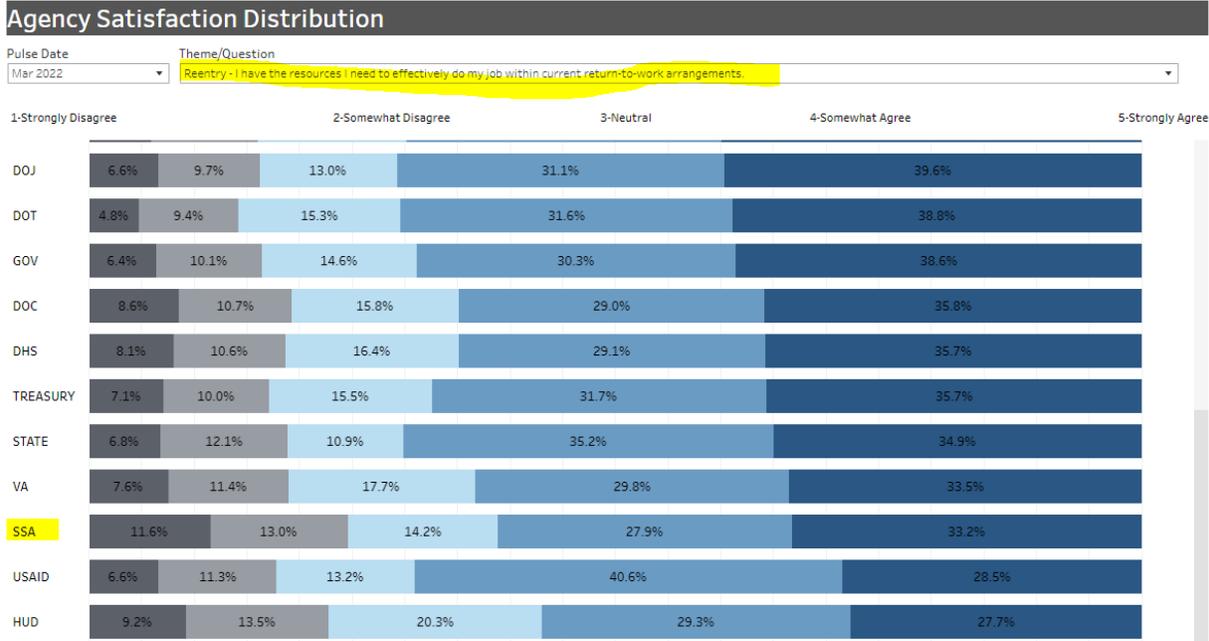
SSA's rankings on worker satisfaction:

25th out of 25



24th out of 25





Agency Satisfaction Distribution

Pulse Date: Mar 2022
 Theme/Question: **My workload is reasonable**

