

Copy of the 'Dear Colleague' Letter from Rep. Bustos Letter to Acting Commissioner Colvin

Dear Acting Commissioner Colvin:

On behalf of the undersigned Members of Congress, I wanted to share with you our concern regarding the Social Security Administration's recently released **Vision 2025**. Our understanding is that **Vision 2025** represents SSA's view of what the agency should look in 10 years. If this is correct, we find it hard to understand why it includes no mention of the role of 1250 field offices located around the U.S. Currently these offices serve 43 million visitors each year and handle almost 60 million telephone inquiries, and we are concerned by the fact that your vision includes virtually no mention of them.

We are glad to see SSA explore further uses of the internet to assist individuals and reduce office wait times, but do not believe the internet is a substitute for the face-to-face service and expertise provided by trained field office personnel. Computers cannot provide people with the options they need to understand and consider before deciding when, and for what benefit, they should be applying.

Our constituents understand this and polling on the subject indicates an overwhelming majority support SSA field offices and would like to see more established around the country. According to a survey conducted by Public Polling Associates in November, 2014, 86 percent of Americans want as many or more field offices in the future. Only 11 percent want to use the Internet or mail to request a replacement Social Security Card. When it comes to filing for benefits, just 13 percent of respondents said they wanted to file for retirement online. Even among people under 30, who are among the most computer literate, that number was only 4 percent.

We would like you to respond to the following questions in writing:

1. What role do you see SSA field offices playing in 10 years that is different from the role they play today?
2. Would you say that the number of these offices should remain about the same, be reduced or be increased over that time period?
3. What is the basis for your view that the public desires to use the internet versus seeing someone at a local office?

We look forward to your response to these important questions. Thank you.

Sincerely,