



August 28, 2012

Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner  
Social Security Administration  
Office of the Commissioner  
6401 Security Blvd. #900  
Baltimore, MD 21235-0001

Dear Commissioner Michael J. Astrue,

On behalf of people with significant disabilities we serve, ACCSES reiterates our request that you immediately take any and all administrative actions under your authority to **extend the current Work Incentives, Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program**. Your announcement on March 9<sup>th</sup> that the SSA will shut down the WIPA program on June 30<sup>th</sup> is jeopardizing the agency's capacity to carry out its legal mandates in the Ticket to Work Act (1999). It is also jeopardizing efforts by other federal, state, and local agencies to enhance the employment rate of people with disabilities.

We fully understand your concern that Congress needs to reauthorize this program as a condition to allowing for its continuation. We are communicating with key Members of Congress and urging them to reauthorize the WIPA program. However, until they are able to complete their work, we ask that you take administrative steps to ensure the continuation of this essential program.

It is our belief that there are in fact administrative options available to you to sustain this valuable program until such time as Congress is able to reauthorize it. This conclusion was recently reaffirmed in an August 14, 2012, letter from the General Counsel of the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO). The GAO concluded that the enabling statute establishing the WIPA program provides legal authority for the agency to carry out the WIPA program despite the absence of authorizations of appropriations. Because the program authority in the enabling statute has not expired, and SSA has an appropriation that is available to cover the cost of the program, GAO concludes that SSA has adequate authority to continue the WIPA program.

As you know, WIPA provides vital information to individuals with disabilities regarding their public benefits, along with advocacy and information that allow them to go to work and increase their self-sufficiency. The cost of the WIPA program is approximately \$375 per individual served, which is greatly offset by the extensive long-term savings in Social Security funds. The benefits counseling infrastructure that has been built over the past decade has become a critical component in assisting individuals to become part of the general workforce.

ACCSES is here to work with you in whatever capacity we can to ensure this vital program is continued and the important services it provides to the individuals with disabilities are kept in place. Please take immediate administrative action to extend this program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terry R. Farmer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "T".

Terry R. Farmer  
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