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www.illinoisretiredamericans.org

27 East Monroe Street, Suite 1100, Chicago IL, 60603
(312) 427-2114 ext. 207 ♦ illinoisara@gmail.com

95,000 Petition Signatures Gathered to Stop Social Security Administration Offices from Closing

Closing Has Already Occurred in Chicago

On Wednesday, June 18th, the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging held a hearing to examine the impact of recent Social Security field office closures and service cuts. In conjunction with the hearing, the Alliance for Retired Americans and its coalition partner Social Security Works have gathered 95,000 petition signatures directing Congress to provide full funding to the Social Security Administration (SSA) and keep Social Security offices open.

The hearing, the culmination of a bipartisan investigation into service reductions at the SSA, comes as baby boomers are filing record numbers of retirement, disability and survivor claims with the agency. Despite the rising demand, the SSA is in the midst of the largest five-year decline in field offices in its 79-year history. Budget cuts have, in part, led the agency to close 64 field offices and 533 temporary mobile offices since 2010. The SSA has also shed some 11,000 workers over the last three years and continues to reduce or eliminate a variety of in-person services.

“Americans came together to create the Social Security system to provide a basic, reliable foundation for retirement and disability,” said Barbara Franklin, Illinois Alliance President. “Closing field offices and making it more difficult to access benefits information is an attempt to dismantle that foundation. It’s time to stop it. It is already affecting Illinois, with a closure having occurred in Chicago.”

“The SSA is funded the same way Social Security benefits are—with payroll taxes that all workers pay,” Ms. Franklin continued. “Its expenses have no impact on the federal debt, and represent less than 1% of Social Security’s annual expenditures. But Congress has still cut fourteen of the last sixteen SSA budget requests. And now, these cuts are being felt, as the SSA is forced to shutter dozens of field offices around the country.”

Seniors Fight for a Responsible State Budget

During the month of May, the Illinois Alliance called on state legislators to maintain the 5% income tax rate, which is scheduled to drop to 3.75% on January 1st, 2015.

If the 5% income tax rate is not made permanent, disastrous cuts to services for seniors and working families will be forced. These cuts would include, 21,000 seniors would not receive the help they need from in-home caretakers, 13,000 teachers would be laid off, 30,000 fewer college students would receive MAP scholarships and hundreds of veterans would be evicted from state veterans’ houses.

On May 14th, the Illinois Alliance sent an email action alert asking its members to email a letter to their state legislators. The action resulted in over 1,770 letters being sent to 176 members of the Illinois General Assembly. On May 22nd, the Illinois Alliance partnered with SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana to send 50 seniors to the Rally to Save Our State at the state capitol.

The Illinois Alliance will continue to demand that state legislators take action to stop these draconian cuts.



Illinois Alliance members rally for a responsible budget at the state capitol in Springfield on May 22nd.



Alliance Kicks Off “Medicare Turns 50” Campaign

The Alliance for Retired Americans celebrated Older Americans Month in May with the announcement of its Medicare Turns 50 campaign.

Medicare is the most successful health care program in America's history. For nearly fifty years it has given seniors the ability to see a doctor and fill a prescription – and it has kept them out of poverty. Prior to the enactment of Medicare in 1965, nearly half of the elderly did not have health insurance. The increase of health care coverage for the elderly has resulted in significant benefits, including improvements in health and income status. Life expectancy at age 65 has increased several years and the poverty rate for the elderly has declined by about half.

The Alliance is leading the charge to celebrate Medicare's 50th birthday, beginning in the summer of 2014 and culminating on Medicare's 50th birthday on July 30th, 2015. The campaign will educate and mobilize seniors to confront the Paul Ryan Budget's tired cries to end Medicare's guarantee and to call for policies to strengthen Medicare. The Illinois Alliance will be participating in this campaign - from collecting petitions to rallying to protect Medicare. Stay tuned for opportunities to get involved with the campaign in your area.



Rep. Jan Schakowsky

Illinois Alliance Member Joins Rep. Jan Schakowsky to Speak Against Medicare Cuts, Further Means Testing

On March 19th, Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (IL-D), Illinois Alliance member Charlie Hogan and experts with the Medicare Rights Center spoke at a press conference call to release 150,000 petition signatures against

further means testing of Medicare, which would mean higher health care costs for middle class seniors.

Schakowsky noted, “At least one in five seniors are already cutting back on health care because they can’t afford it.” She also pushed for congressional action for Medicare being giving the ability to negotiate drug prices, saying that it was a far superior policy than means testing.

Charlie Hogan echoed Rep. Schakowsky’s call to put aside Medicare cuts, saying that “Austerity will not work, we cannot cut our way out.”

Illinois Alliance Delegates Attend National Alliance’s Convention

Nearly 20 members of the Illinois Alliance attended the Alliance for Retired Americans’ convention, which took place in Las Vegas, Nevada on April 28th through May 1st.

Barbara Easterling, was re-elected President and Ruben Burks was re-elected as Secretary. Six non-union members were elected to the Community Advocacy Network, including Illinois Alliance Executive Board member Michael Kelly.

Speakers in Las Vegas included Linda Chavez-Thompson, former Executive Vice-President of the AFL-CIO and Liz Shuler, Alliance Executive Vice President and Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO. Vice President Joe Biden and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (NV) sent videotaped messages.

Sixteen resolutions were passed at the convention. Resolutions were passed opposing the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision; opposing the agenda of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC); addressing income inequality; and stopping Social Security field office closings and services cuts.

Action sessions devoted to standing up to ALEC, and to addressing scams aimed at Social Security beneficiaries, were noted for opening delegates’ eyes to the newest threats that retirees face.



Illinois Alliance Executive Board members Leandres White, Katie Jordan and Drunita Steward at the convention.