

For Immediate Release
July 26, 2018

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Van Hollen, Cardin Demand Answers from SSA's Treatment of Unions and Federal Employees

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Chris Van Hollen and Ben Cardin (both D-Md.) are raising serious concerns about the treatment of unions and federal employees at the Social Security Administration (SSA), following President Trump's recent executive orders attacking civil servants. They have sent separate letters to SSA's Acting Commissioner and Associate Commissioner for Labor-Management and Employee Relations [[LINK](#)], the nominee to be the Commissioner [[LINK](#)], and the nominee to be the Deputy Commissioner [[LINK](#)].

“We remain deeply concerned about how these orders undermine lawful civil service protections for federal employees throughout the government. Since signing that letter, it has come to our attention that SSA leadership has demonstrated particular hostility towards its workforce in the way it is implementing the Executive Orders,” **the Senators wrote.**

SSA is going far beyond what the executive orders called for – they have already slashed official time for union members to represent fellow employees and they plan to evict the unions from their office space at SSA headquarters as early as next week. As a result, federal employees who are working to administer this critical program are not having their voices heard and whistleblowers will have a much harder time coming forward.

The Senators added, “We understand that SSA cannot disregard these executive orders, but we do not understand why SSA is implementing these orders with more hostility towards its workforce than the executive orders require (and possibly even more hostility than they permit). Please explain to us what legal or regulatory barriers prevent SSA from honoring its existing collective bargaining agreements while negotiating new agreements in good faith with the unions.”

Outside groups applauded Senators Van Hollen and Cardin for raising these critical issues.

“The Social Security Administration is using President Trump's executive orders targeting the federal workforce as a cover to bust the union and deny workers their legal rights to representation. Thank you to Senators Ben Cardin and Chris Van Hollen for their efforts to hold SSA leadership accountable for their outrageous and illegal attempts to purge unions from the federal workplace, and their role in protecting the important services hardworking Social Security employees deliver to the American public,” **AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr. said.**

“Donald Trump's recent executive orders harm all of us. By seeking to politicize the civil service and undermine their representatives, the orders will, inexorably, over time, substantially weaken our ability to access our hard-earned Social Security benefits. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Senators Ben Cardin

and Chris Van Hollen for pushing back on these destructive measures,” **said Nancy Altman, President of Social Security Works.**

“SSA management’s actions are so extreme that they are bordering on ludicrous. The agency has incorrectly interpreted the executive orders to mean a complete ban on representational actions in the workplace,” **said Tony Reardon, National President of the National Treasury Employees Union.** “For instance, employees can make personal phone calls from work but a union steward cannot make a phone call, on their own time, concerning a representational matter because that would constitute use of agency space for union activities. And, elected worker representatives are being told they cannot email bargaining unit members related to an employee workplace issue or to be given a private place to meet with these individuals, after losing dedicated space for representation matters. Senators Cardin and Van Hollen are right to be concerned and I thank them for calling on SSA leaders to account for their actions.”

Judicial Council 1/AALJ President Judge Marilyn Zahm said, “We applaud both Senators Van Hollen and Cardin for stepping up in support of the rule of law at SSA. Unfortunately, SSA was all too eager to implement the Executive Orders, even though our union has a pending contract in place. Their unilateral implementation violates our contract, and even the Executive Orders themselves, which clearly state that agencies are not to ‘abrogate’ collective bargaining agreements currently in effect. The behavior of the SSA is truly lawless, at this point, and the oversight of them by Senators Van Hollen and Cardin is much needed.”

“The Social Security Administration has a much-deserved reputation for being one of, if not the most hostile agency towards their workforce and their unions in the entire federal government. Their decision to unilaterally implement these Executive Orders, and in violation of pending contracts, only solidifies this stain on the SSA. This is even more profound when you consider that the workers at the SSA, including IFPTE represented ALJs, serve those most in need of service each day, including some of our most vulnerable citizens. During a time when the Congressional majority is doing nothing while abdicating their lawmaking role to the Trump Administration, IFPTE is appreciative that Senators Van Hollen and Cardin are seeking to hold the current SSA leadership, and those who hope to lead the agency, accountable,” **said IFPTE President Paul Shearon.**

“The National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare strongly opposes President Trump’s executive order to politicize the selection of administrative law judges (ALJs) who decide Social Security disability claims. For decades, ALJs have been chosen based on their credentials and experience, but essentially could now become political appointees. The Trump administration will likely appoint judges who share its hostility to Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). The administration and its GOP allies in Congress have already proposed to slash SSDI by \$64 billion over 10 years. Appointing judges who are biased against SSDI is yet another way to cut disabled Americans’ benefits. Claimants are entitled to have their cases adjudicated by neutral, fair-minded judges. Congress must step up and ensure that ALJs continue to be chosen for their qualifications instead of their political loyalties, so that disabled workers can continue to collect their hard-earned benefits,” **said Max Richtman, president and CEO of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare.**

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