



HEARING PROCESS REFORMS

- **Streamlined Fully Favorable Decisional Templates:** Almost half a million work hours could be saved if AALJ's streamlined fully favorable plan were to be implemented, which means that more cases could be heard, more decisions could be issued, and the backlog could be significantly reduced.
- **Expedited Dismissal Process:** Eliminating abandoned cases earlier in the process, before the agency expends significant resources on them, can save an average of 1.5 hours per judge per case. The potential savings in judicial time by expediting the dismissal process: **165,936 judge hours**. Clerical hours could also be saved: **221,248**.
- **Dedicated Clerical and Writing Staff for Each Judge:** A judge needs dedicated clerical and attorney support in order to be productive. In many hearing offices, management has stripped the judges of their assigned clerical support and writers are in remote locations. As a result, judges spend their time performing clerical functions, correcting mistakes, and editing poorly crafted decisions. Judges need an assigned clerk and two writers in order to be efficient.
- **Procedural Rules:** A lack of rules of practice impedes the smooth operation of the adjudicatory process. SSA holds more adjudicatory hearings than any other court system-700,000 per year-yet has no rules of procedure for those who practice before it. The submission of evidence in a timely fashion to permit the Judge and expert witnesses proper time to review the evidence and the closure of the record are two critical measures that are missing. These rules would be relaxed for unrepresented claimants.
- **Eliminate Regional Offices:** Centralize the administrative work in Headquarters. Regional Offices are a waste of expensive real estate and personnel. Given technology advances, having Regional Offices serve as middlemen in the reporting chain is unnecessary. Approximately 400 regional employees can be redeployed to do program work, the mission of the agency.
- **Flatten Hearing Office Management:** The current management structure in each of the 166 hearing offices provides for a Hearing Office Chief Administrative Law Judge, a Hearing Office Director and several group supervisors. We suggest that the hearing office structure be streamlined to eliminate group supervisors. In addition to the Hearing Office Chief Administrative Law Judge, we only need a Hearing Office manager, a deputy hearing office manager in large offices, and a supervising attorney for the writers. Almost 200 staffers could be returned to case-handling activities under this plan.
- **Streamline the Hearings, Appeals, and Litigation Law Manual (HALLEX):** Over the past few years, the Agency has added more and more requirements for the Judges to adjudicate cases, most of which are unnecessary and simply add to the use of time and resources in order for us to hear and decide cases. HALLEX needs to be thoroughly reviewed and its dictates streamlined so that adjudicatory process becomes efficient.