



# News Release

SOCIAL SECURITY

## Social Security Helps States with Mounting Disability Claims

Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, today announced that the agency's first Extended Service Team (EST) is open for business in Little Rock, Arkansas. The Little Rock EST will make disability decisions for state Disability Determinations Services (DDSs) that are most adversely affected by the flood of new initial disability claims resulting from the economic downturn and from counterproductive furloughs of employees at the state level. Later this year, Social Security will open additional ESTs in Madison, Mississippi; Roanoke, Virginia; and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The ESTs are in states that have a history of high quality and productivity, as well as the capacity to hire and train significant numbers of additional employees.

"The strategy behind ESTs builds on our success with National Hearing Centers, where cases are handled electronically from all over the country," Commissioner Astrue said. "These centralized units have reduced the hearings backlog and improved processing times at some of the hardest-hit hearing offices. This approach clearly works and extending it in this way can help us meet the challenge of unprecedented growth in our disability workloads."

Social Security expects to receive more than 3.3 million applications for disability benefits this fiscal year (FY), about 700,000 more than in FY 2008. In addition, more than a dozen states are furloughing federally-funded state workers who make disability decisions for Social Security. The combination of increased workloads and state furloughs has resulted in a growing backlog of initial disability applications in state DDSs.

"More Americans than ever are turning to us for help," said Commissioner Astrue. "I am grateful that Governor Beebe bucked the trend and recognized the value of more of our federally-funded jobs in his state. The opening of the Arkansas EST and our other planned expansions in Mississippi, Virginia, and Oklahoma will significantly benefit disabled workers and their families as well as create new job opportunities to these states during difficult economic times."

For more information about Social Security's strategy to address the unprecedented increase in disability benefit applications, go to [www.socialsecurity.gov/legislation/testimony\\_111909.htm](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/legislation/testimony_111909.htm).

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