



News Release

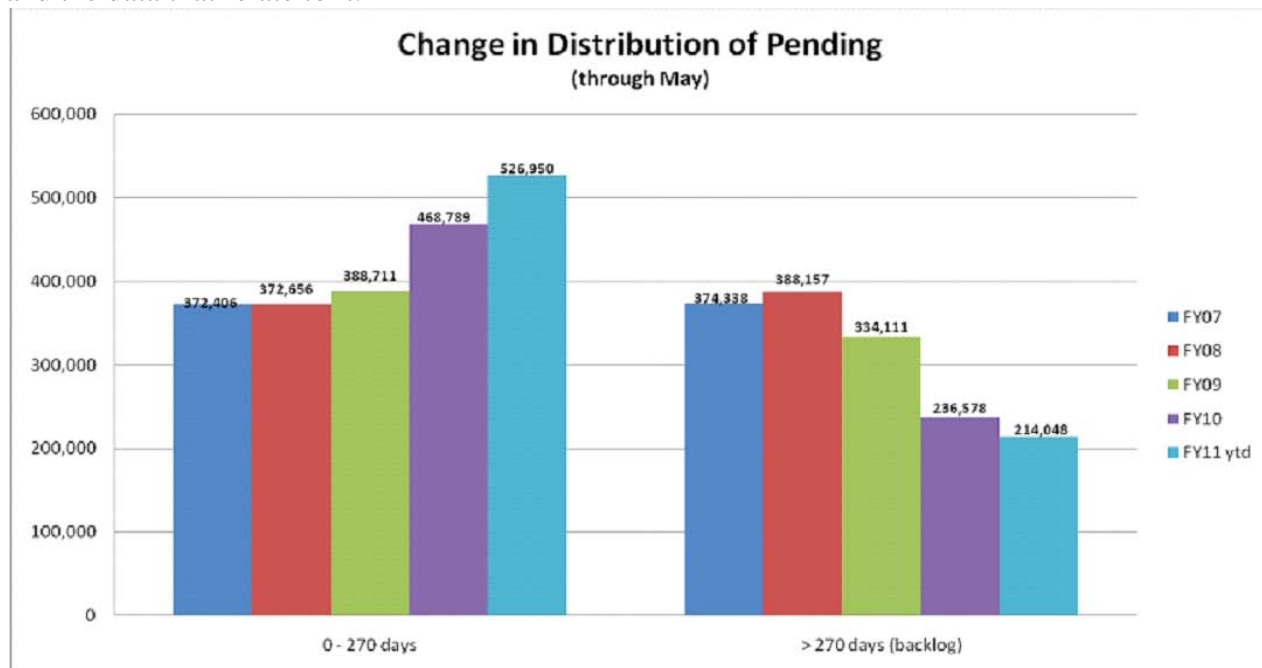
SOCIAL SECURITY

Statement of Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, on Flawed Syracuse University Report

The Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) “analysis” of our hearing backlog reduction efforts is sloppy and irresponsible. It focuses on the wrong measures, ignores the tremendous progress we have made in addressing the disability hearing backlog, and reaches the incorrect conclusion that we are “faltering.”

What matters most to someone waiting for a decision is how quickly we decide their case, not how many other people are waiting for a hearing. We have made significant progress in reducing that time. In August 2008, the average wait time for a decision peaked at 532 days. In May 2011, the average processing time for a hearing decision was less than a year at 354 days -- the lowest monthly figure since October 2003.

The agency’s published benchmark for processing hearing cases is 270 days, and we established it in consultation with Congress and the disability advocacy community. In 2008, nearly half of the people waiting for a decision waited more than 270 days. As of May 2011, only 29 percent of pending hearings were over 270 days. TRAC misrepresents the facts by failing to note this standard and the data that relate to it.



TRAC's focus on the number of pending hearings is a flawed measurement of our improving service and bears little relevance to the public's experience. Due to the economic downturn and the aging of the baby boomers, our workloads have been skyrocketing. We received 130,000 more hearing requests in 2010 than we received in 2008. Despite this increase, we have steadily improved service. We are deciding more cases, and deciding them accurately and quickly.

Our backlog reduction plan is working and has made a difference to the hundreds of thousands of people waiting on a hearing decision. Without it, the average processing time would be approaching 600 days, and we would be well on our way to 1 million people waiting on a decision. The TRAC report is clearly wrong in its conclusion that our backlog reduction efforts have been unsuccessful, and I call on Syracuse University to separate itself from this report and its authors.

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