

Social Security hearings backlog falls to lowest level since 2005

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Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, last week announced that the number of disability hearings pending stands at 697,437 cases -- the lowest level since June 2005 and down more than 71,000 cases since December 2008, when the trend of month-by-month reductions began. In addition, the average processing time for hearing decisions has decreased to 442 days, down from a high of 514 days at the end of fiscal year (FY) 2008.

"We have decreased the number of hearings pending by almost 10 percent over the last 14 months and cut the time it takes to make a decision by nearly two and a half months. This remarkable progress shows our backlog reduction plan is working," Commissioner Astrue said. "With ongoing support from the President and Congress as well as the efforts of our hardworking employees, I am confident the hearings backlog will continue to diminish."

Social Security has actively addressed the hearings backlog and increased the capacity to hold more hearings. The agency hired 147 Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) and over 1,000 support staff in FY 2009, and has plans to hire an additional 226 ALJs this year. The agency now has four National Hearing Centers to help process hearings by video conference for the most hard-hit areas of the country. The agency also has aggressive plans to open 14 new hearing offices and three satellite offices by the end of the year. The first of these offices was opened in Anchorage, Alaska on February 19, 2010.

For more information about Social Security's hearings process and backlog reduction initiatives, go to www.socialsecurity.gov/appeals.