

January 8th, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate

Dear Speaker Johnson, Minority Leader Jeffries, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McConnell:

Outdated asset limits for the Supplemental Security Income program discourage millions of Americans from saving, working, and practicing good financial habits. Our nation's safety net should provide critical assistance to vulnerable Americans while empowering them to fully participate in the life of their communities. Our undersigned organizations urge you and your colleagues to support the bipartisan, bicameral *SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act* (S. 2767 | H.R. 5408) and look for opportunities to include this reform in upcoming legislative packages.

The Supplemental Security Income program offers essential financial support to disabled and elderly Americans with limited means and limited ability to work,<sup>1</sup> but the program in its current form penalizes marriage and discourages financial responsibility. In order to qualify for SSI, individuals cannot have more than \$2,000 in assets; married couples can have no more than \$3,000, putting SSI recipients at risk of losing program access should they choose to marry.<sup>2</sup> These thresholds have remained unchanged for over 30 years even as other features of the federal tax code and safety net have been updated to account for inflation.<sup>3</sup> Such low asset limits confront SSI recipients with an impossible dynamic – taking modest steps to save for future emergencies can threaten access to their critical monthly benefits.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, outdated asset limits in SSI have become a leading driver of Social Security Administration overpayments, a critical threat to program integrity which also results in hardship for families facing abrupt benefit suspension or reduction in already low monthly benefits.<sup>5</sup>

The *SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act* would remove outdated government barriers to marriage, saving, and work for millions of vulnerable, low-income Americans. To account for

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<sup>1</sup> Congressional Research Service, "Supplemental Security Income". April 14, 2023.

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10482>.

<sup>2</sup> Sara Luterman, "Marriage could mean losing life-saving benefits for people with disabilities. So they're protesting," *The 19th*, September 13, 2023.

<https://19thnews.org/2023/09/disability-advocates-marriage-equality-commitment-ceremony/>.

<sup>3</sup> Will Raderman, "How Stingy SSI rules erode working, savings, and family values," Niskanen Center, September 1, 2022. <https://www.niskanencenter.org/how-stingy-ssi-rules-erode-work-savings-and-family-values/>.

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Vallas, "New Bipartisan Bill Would Update Outdated SSI Limits," *Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity*, September 13, 2023.

<https://spotlightonpoverty.org/spotlight-exclusives/new-bipartisan-bill-would-update-outdated-ssi-income-limits/>.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy J. Altman, "The Pressing Need to Update, Expand, and Simplify SSI." Individual Statement on the Supplemental Security Income Program for the Social Security Administration, May 26, 2020.

[https://s3-us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/cg-778536a2-e58c-44f1-9173-29749804ec54/uploads/2020/06/2020\\_SS\\_I\\_Altman\\_Statement-Update-Expand-Simplify.pdf](https://s3-us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/cg-778536a2-e58c-44f1-9173-29749804ec54/uploads/2020/06/2020_SS_I_Altman_Statement-Update-Expand-Simplify.pdf).

changes in the cost of living since the start of the program, the bill raises the SSI asset limits to \$10,000 for individuals and \$20,000 for couples and indexes these thresholds to inflation moving forward. These changes would empower disabled and elderly Americans to pursue work to the best of their ability and financial security, contributing to economic prosperity and family flourishing.<sup>6</sup>

Federal assistance for disabled and elderly Americans should ensure recipients' basic dignity and ability to live a fulfilling life, not punish financial responsibility or forming a family. We urge you and your colleagues to quickly pass the *SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act* and remove government-imposed barriers to success, saving and well-being.

Sincerely,

AARP

Aspen Institute Financial Security Program

Bipartisan Policy Center Action

Center for Law and Social Policy

Coalition on Human Needs

Community Legal Services of Philadelphia

Faith and Freedom Coalition

Justice in Aging

National Association of Evangelicals

Niskanen Center

The Arc of the United States

United States Chamber of Commerce

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<sup>6</sup> JPMorgan Chase PolicyCenter, Enhancing Economic Opportunity and Mobility for People with Disabilities through Asset and Income Limit Reforms, February 24, 2022.  
<https://www.jpmorganchase.com/content/dam/jpmc/jpmorgan-chase-and-co/documents/policy-center-asset-limit-issue-brief-ada.pdf>