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Statement for the Record

Subcommittee Hearing: Policy Options for Improving SSI
Subcommittee on Social Security, Pensions, and Family Policy
United States Senate Committee on Finance
Tuesday, September 21, 2021

September 20, 2021

Chairman Brown
Subcommittee on Social Security, Pensions, and Family Policy
United States Senate Committee on Finance

Ranking Member Young
Subcommittee on Social Security, Pensions, and Family Policy
United States Senate Committee on Finance

Dear Chairman Brown and Ranking Member Young,

The Arc of the United States writes to thank you for holding this hearing on the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. The Arc is the largest national community-based organization advocating for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families. The SSI program is particularly important to people with IDD and their families; over 20% of SSI beneficiaries are adults or children with an intellectual disability, including a disproportionate number of people of color with an intellectual disability.

In 1972, SSI was enacted to keep the lowest income adults and children with disabilities and older adults from living in poverty. However, due to decades of neglect, the program no longer lives up to those ideals and leaves peoples with disabilities and older adults trapped in deep poverty. Our members encounter major challenges with the \$2,000 asset limit that prevents individuals from saving. The \$65 earned income disregard and \$20 unearned income disregard discourage SSI beneficiaries from working. Many people with IDD do not marry because of the marriage penalties that reduce both benefits and asset limits for married couples on SSI. Others cannot afford rent and other necessary expenses on the sub-poverty benefits. And all of these issues are complicated by the penalties for accepting help from family and friends.

Chairman Brown's SSI Restoration Act, which we strongly support, would address these challenges and make many other needed changes to SSI. We thank the Chairman for this legislation and his focus on the needs of people with disabilities. These changes to SSI are long overdue. We would urge you to include improvements to SSI in the upcoming budget reconciliation package or any other legislative vehicle. These desperately needed changes would improve the lives of the 8 million people with disabilities and seniors who rely on SSI.

Almost 50 years ago, Congress made a commitment to the lowest income adults and children with disabilities—that they would not be forced live in deep poverty because of their disabilities. We urge you to reaffirm this commitment and update SSI.

Sincerely,

Bethany Lilly
Senior Director of Income Policy
The Arc of the United States
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