

Washington, DC -- U.S. Representative Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) criticized the Social Security Administration (SSA) today for refusing to listen to local and Congressional opposition and proceeding with plans to close the Auburn SSA District Office.

“People who have worked their whole lives and paid into Social Security deserve a local office where they can go with questions or complications and receive face-to-face service,” **Arcuri said**. “I have continuously stated my strong opposition to the SSA’s closure plan, including meetings with high level staff, and strongly supported legislation which passed the House to give the SSA the funds they said they needed to keep the Auburn office open. The Auburn SSA office is a critical community resource that serves some of our most vulnerable citizens and I will work with the SSA to make sure local residents get the services they need.”

Arcuri sent a strongly worded letter to SSA Commissioner Michael J. Astrue today in response to the Agency’s plans to close the Auburn SSA office in mid-October. In a personal letter to Arcuri regarding the SSA’s decision, Astrue cited SSA budget constraints and local staffing concerns.

Arcuri called into question the Administrations’ stated reasons for closing the office and demanded follow up meetings with senior level staff. In his letter to Commissioner Astrue, Arcuri stated, “It seems obvious to me that two things have happened: 1) SSA has made no effort whatsoever to fill staffing voids at Auburn; and 2) the decrease in visitors can be attributed to the decrease in available services and convenient office hours for the general public.”

Astrue also addressed Arcuri’s concerns that the closure would place undue burden on local beneficiaries, stating in his letter, “we are actively seeking a suitable location within Auburn so that we can provide, on a periodic basis, services for those individuals who are not comfortable with doing SSA business over the telephone for internet and might find it a hardship to travel to Geneva or Syracuse for face-to-face service.”

In August, Arcuri called on the SSA to utilize \$9.3 billion in funding passed by the House of Representatives to keep the Auburn field office open. Congress passed H.R. 3043, the Fiscal Year 2008 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill which provides \$9.3 billion for SSA administrative expenses. The

\$9.3 billion represents a \$401 million increase over the FY 2007 level and a \$100 million increase above the President's request.

In June, Arcuri met with Linda McMahon, Deputy Commissioner for Operations, and was told that without increased administrative funding from Congress, the SSA would have to move forward with proposed field office closings.

After hearing that the Auburn office was being considered for closure, Arcuri sent two letters to Astrue stating his strong opposition to closing the office and requesting meetings with SSA officials.

A copy of Arcuri's response to SSA Commissioner Astrue can be found below:

October 3, 2007

Mr. Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner  
Social Security Administration  
6401 Security Boulevard  
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Commissioner Astrue:

I am writing to reiterate my strong objections to the Social Security Administration's decision to close the Auburn, NY District Office in mid-October.

As you know, I strongly supported the House passed Fiscal Year 2008 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, which would provide SSA with an additional \$401 million for administrative expenses above the FY 2007 level. Through my meetings with SSA staff regarding this matter, it has been made clear that additional

administrative funding was a critical step to staving off closure of the Auburn office. I find it troubling that SSA would move forward with any district office closures this year before the Agency's administrative budget for FY 2008 is finalized. According to the Auburn Service Delivery Assessment (SDA), consolidation of the Auburn District Office would only provide \$2 million in savings for SSA over the next ten years.

The first crop of baby boomers will begin to retire next year, resulting in a significant increase in the number of Social Security recipients, most notably in New York State which is home to more senior citizens than any other state in the nation. It seems quite clear to me with New York's senior population on the rise, more SSA face-to-face services – not less – will be needed in the coming years.

It is my understanding that staffing at the Auburn office has decreased from 16 employees to three over the last ten years. The SDA attributes the decrease in available staffing to attrition, and notes that the Auburn office, which closes at 2pm daily, only provides limited services to the public. The SDA also states the Auburn office has the lowest numbers of visitors in the region. It seems obvious to me that two things have happened: 1) SSA has made no effort whatsoever to fill staffing voids at Auburn; and 2) the decrease in visitors can be attributed to the decrease in available services and convenient office hours for the general public.

I respectfully request a follow-up meeting with the appropriate member(s) of your staff to discuss SSA's closure plan for the Auburn District Office as soon as possible. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,  
MICHAEL A. ARCURI  
Member of Congress

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