

Social Security Phone Services Win Two-Week Reprieve

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In the last-minute switch, the SSA delayed DOGE-induced changes but also said disability beneficiaries will be able to maintain using phone services. However, applicants and beneficiaries for retirement, Medicare and other benefits will still be restricted to online or in-pers...

By Mary Helen Gillespie

The Social Security Administration late on March 26 suddenly reversed plans to cut phone services for disabled and some older Americans following a firestorm of complaints from lawmakers, advocates and beneficiaries nationwide.

But applicants for retirement, survivors or auxiliary benefits who cannot use the agency's online system will still need to verify their identity in person at a SSA office starting April 14, a two-week delay from the SSA original announcement.

The anticipated changes for all beneficiaries and applicants were scheduled to start March 31 as part of the SSA's multi-prong attempt under the Trump administration to reduce federal spending and eliminate alleged fraud by tightening identity policies.

"Under the updated policy beginning April 14, 2025, individuals applying for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Medicare, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) who cannot use a personal [my Social Security](#) account can complete their claim entirely over the telephone without the need to come into an office," [according to the SSA press release](#). The SSA manages [Medicare enrollment](#) on behalf of the [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services](#).

Democratic members of Congress sent a letter to SSA management railing against the phone service change and emphasized that it would "create additional barriers" for those who need services — particularly for residents of rural communities. Elder and disability

advocates also argued that SSA staffing reductions and closed offices are already causing long wait times and disruptions to service for vulnerable Americans without access to computers or with limited technology skills.

“This is a good first step by the Social Security Administration to respond to the concerns of AARP, our members and older Americans everywhere about plans to discontinue phone service for critical Social Security customer service needs,” Nancy LeaMond, AARP’s chief advocacy and engagement officer, said in a [March 26 statement](#).

“Merely delaying the implementation of this change is not enough, though,” she added. “SSA should take a deliberate approach to its proposed changes to customer service that seeks public input, follows a clear communication plan and allows a reasonable timeframe for compliance.”

Disability claims are taking 200 to 230 days to process, according to a recorded message on the SSA 1-800-772-1213 phone line as of 10 a.m. March 27, and there was an anticipated wait time of five hours to speak to a live representative. As recently as November 2024, the wait time for phone service was less than 90 minutes.

Meanwhile, President Trump on March 26 signed an [executive order](#) requiring the federal government to stop issuing paper checks by Sept. 30 and switch to “direct deposit, prepaid card accounts, and other digital payment options.” The order does include language supporting payments to Americans without bank accounts.

This will impact [455,601](#) of 68 million Social Security beneficiaries who receive their monthly payments by paper check with the highest number — 44,644 — living in California.
