

November 21, 2022

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

The undersigned unions represent millions of public service workers and working families across the country. We urge you to pass the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82) as soon as possible.

Over the past four decades, the Social Security Act's Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset penalties have undermined the economic security of millions of seniors across the country.

The retirees we represent have faith that when you contribute to Social Security, it will be there for you when you retire. Period. Simply put, the GPO and the WEP work together to undermine this basic covenant and trust. No one who works hard and pays into Social Security should retire and see their benefits slashed. We should always be fighting for solutions to ease the burdens on working families.

To this end, our unions believe strongly that Congress has an unprecedented and long-overdue opportunity to deliver fairness and respect to these same seniors by eliminating these penalties.

Last week's action by the House to overwhelmingly approve H.R. 82 makes it imperative that the Senate now also prioritize its passage in the remaining days of the 118th Congress. This would send a strong and clear message that government can deliver real solutions to help reduce costs for millions of working families across America.

For more than four decades, the WEP has unfairly penalized retirees who have had careers in public service but have also paid into Social Security at some points, whether while working in the private sector or while working in the public sector in states not affected by the WEP. There are 2.8 million retired public employees and more than 6 million current public employees who are affected by the WEP. This includes educators; postal workers; firefighters; law enforcement officers; and program staff at state, county and municipal level administrative agencies, some of whom have spent over two decades paying into Social Security.

Similarly, the GPO hurts hundreds of thousands more retired public employees, and current public employees will potentially triple that number. Under the GPO, a Social Security-penalized worker receiving a public pension, whose spouse is collecting a Social Security benefit, is not entitled to that spousal benefit when the spouse dies before they do. The Social Security benefit is "offset" by their public pension. However, any other surviving spouse is entitled to that Social Security death benefit, even if they are drawing from a substantial retirement account like a 401(k) or an IRA. This is a wrong that should be righted as soon as possible.

Older Americans covered by the WEP have seen their earned Social Security benefit reduced by 40-60 percent. The GPO disproportionately affects women, who are five times as likely as men to be penalized by the GPO and already significantly more likely to be impoverished as

they get older. One must consider that many women take time out of the workforce to raise their children and may never qualify for full public pensions. GPO-reduced Social Security spousal benefits add significantly to seniors' struggle to make ends meet when they can no longer work.

The impact of the WEP and the GPO is more far-reaching than you might imagine. There are millions of public service positions that are currently unfilled. Recent estimates show 1 million unfilled public service positions, particularly in healthcare and public safety, and 86 percent of U.S. public schools have difficulty recruiting educators, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Eliminating the WEP and the GPO should be a part of a multifaceted approach to ensuring these positions are filled. No job applicant should be expected to sacrifice their earned Social Security benefits in order to take a job. We simply cannot have laws that punish public service. The Social Security system should treat fairly those who teach in our schools, keep our communities and homes safe, deliver our mail or provide vital local government services.

Social Security is a bedrock that American families rely on when they retire, become disabled or experience the death of a spouse. Make no mistake, the labor movement is committed to expanding and strengthening Social Security. We have and will be a part of the struggle to do this. Repealing the WEP and the GPO is a step in the right direction and should be taken now when there is an opportunity to do so.

We encourage you to bring fairness to the many seniors we are proud to represent in our respective unions and urge you to prioritize passage of H.R. 82.

Sincerely,

AFT

American Postal Workers Union (APWU)

AFL-CIO

AFSCME

Alliance for Retired Americans

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)

American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)

American Federation of Musicians

American Federation of School Administrators

Association of Flight Attendants-CWA

Communications Workers of America (CWA)

CWA Public, Healthcare and Education Workers Sector

Federal Education Association

International Assoc of Machinists and Aerospace Workers

International Association of Fire Fighters

International Association of Machinist and Aerospace Workers

International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers

International Brotherhood Of Teamsters (IBT)

International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)

International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots

International Plate Printers, Die Stampers, Plate Makers & Engravers Union of North America

Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO

NAGE

NATCA

National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE)
National Association of Agriculture Employees
National Association of Letter Carriers
National Association of Police Organizations
National Education Association (NEA)
National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE-IAM)
National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU)
National Rural Letter Carriers' Association
Patent Office Professional Association
PPPWU
Service Employees International Union (SEIU).
The International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers
Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO
United Steelworkers