Ms. Carolyn Colvin  
Acting Commissioner Social Security Administration  
440 Almeyer Building  
6401 Security Blvd.  
Baltimore, MD 21235-0001  

Dear Commissioner Colvin:

The Social Security Administration's (SSA) hearing system should be a fair and effective process for determining who is eligible for government benefits. In Alaska, the fairness and effectiveness of that process has been called into serious question. Currently, hearing decisions in Alaska are approving claims at less than half the rate of other states.

The national average for winning a disability hearing is approximately 46 percent. Alaska's current average for winning a disability hearing is approximately 18 percent, the lowest in the country. The next lowest state is Kansas with a hearing approval rate of 33 percent. Alaska also has the highest rate of hearing dismissals in the country, 29 percent compared to a national average of 18 percent. Finally, of the two SSA administrative law judges in Alaska, one has the lowest approval rate in the country. The remaining judge also has a low approval rate of 24 percent, about half the national average. I am enclosing a chart with specific numbers.

The significantly disparate hearing approval rate in Alaska warrants an explanation as otherwise qualified Alaskans with disabilities are likely being denied the benefits to which they are entitled. I request your office provide me with a full accounting on the numbers and reasons why Alaska continues to have one of the lowest approval ratings in the country.

I look forward to a quick response from your office; you can contact my staff, Diane DiSanto at Diane.DiSanto@begich.senate.gov, 202-224-9626. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mark Begich  
United States Senator

Enclosure