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DATE: October 21, 1998

TO: NATIONAL COUNCIL SSMA OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE  
COMMITTEE

RE: Legislative Report #34

The 105th Congress adjourned today; the 106th has been scheduled to begin at noon on January 6, 1999.

Details of the final version of the omnibus appropriations bill, which went to the President for signature today, are becoming available. My next report should contain relevant provisions from both the Treasury/Postal appropriations bill, which affects federal pay and benefits; the Labor/HHS/Education measure containing SSA's final FY 99 funding level; and any other last minute legislation of special interest to federal employees.

**Overtime issue update:** Just prior to the conclusion of the 105th, and as a result of the efforts of NCSSMA and FMA, Reps. Davis (R-Va.), Morella (R-Md.) and Cummings (D-Md.) wrote jointly to OPM Director Janice LaChance requesting OPM's "assistance in addressing problems faced by Federal managers and supervisors when it comes to overtime pay. Specifically, we would like to reiterate the request made by Congressman Cummings at the June 24th Civil Service Subcommittee hearing on proposed legislation along with appropriate analysis . . . We would greatly appreciate your best efforts in submitting this proposal by January 15, 1999."

The letter notes that, although the overtime cap was raised from Grade 9 Step 1 in 1954 to Grade 10 Step 1 in 1966, it has not been modified again during the past 32 years to keep pace with grade changes, creating a serious disincentive for employees to move into or remain in supervisory positions: "This financial disincentive to promotion with the Federal Government needs to be addressed. . . In your June 24th testimony before the Civil Service Subcommittee, you expressed some concerns about H.R. 3956 but stated that OPM 'would be pleased to work with the Subcommittee to identify a less costly, but fair, solution to this problem.' H.R. 3956 is gaining bipartisan support in Congress. It currently has 16 co-sponsors and we plan to reintroduce it next session. OPM's proposal and analysis would greatly promote our efforts. We are eager to work with you on this issue and look forward to hearing from you."

Note: The number of co-sponsors has actually risen to 18, with this week's addition of Rep. G. Brown (D-Ca.) and Rep. Dicks (D-Wash). NCSSMA will ask each of the 18 to become original co-sponsors of the legislation when it is reintroduced early next year. Since it will

remain critically important to obtain greater congressional support, particularly if OMB and OPM continue to show a lack of support, we will distribute a revised set of materials and instructions on this issue through the grassroots network after the elections.

**GAO looks at Supervisors in Federal Government and at Supervisory Ratio at SSA:**

Attached to this report is a letter sent by Ron Niesing to GAO's General Government Division urging the inclusion of SSA as one of the agencies to be studied as GAO takes a governmentwide look at supervisors during the era of downsizing. That study, which was requested by the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, is not yet fine-tuned, but will look at the number and role of supervisors at federal agencies compared to trends in the private sector and will probably deal with the strategies and impact of attempts to meet the supervisory ratio targets stemming from the NPR. NCSSMA will have an opportunity to share its views and recommendations with GAO during that study if the project includes analysis of SSA.

At the same time, an undisclosed Member of Congress has requested that GAO's Health and Human Services Division look specifically at SSA's handling of the supervisory ratio target, and that GAO team has contacted NCSSMA for input. That study, too, is in an early formative period. Ron Niesing and I are putting together for this team a package of materials from past testimony and position papers on the supervisory ratio topic, and we have recommended that someone on the project directly involve managers and supervisors in both field offices and teleservice centers. We expect specific questions from this team as soon as they have determined the extent and direction of their investigation.

We will keep in close touch with both GAO teams as they conduct these studies over the next several months.

End

NCSSMA Letterhead

October 1, 1998

Mr. Michael Brostek  
Associate Director  
Federal Management and  
Workforce Issues  
General Government Division  
441 G Street, N.W.  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Brostek:

Thank you for speaking last week with our Washington representative, Janet Garry, regarding the subject and timetable for your study on Federal supervisors in the context of governmentwide downsizing. I understand that you will cover span of control changes and other impacts of reductions in the supervisory ranks.

The National Council of Social Security Management Associations represents over 3,000 managers and supervisors serving in Social Security field offices and teleservice centers across the country. We are the people responsible every day for dealing with the American public in person and over the telephone, and we feel strongly that we are accountable to those we serve for the best service we can deliver. Attached is a brief fact sheet about our Association's history and goals.

The majority of our members are supervisors on the front lines at SSA. We urge you to make SSA one of the agencies analyzed for the study you are undertaking. We believe that the study should incorporate the views and experiences of supervisors who understand firsthand the realities of SSA's frontline operations. The community-based nature of our work contributes to a unique role for the SSA field network. Our supervisors and managers are responsible not only for workload quality control and personnel management activities, but also for identification of fraud and abuse, coverage of longer hours of operation for the convenience of the public, space management, supply acquisition, public information activities, and interactions with community groups and other agencies. The loss of staffing resources as SSA has continued to downsize and the loss of supervisors as a result of SSA's movement toward a one to fifteen supervisory ratio seriously impact our ability to manage our offices and the quality of public services in ways which also may be unique in the federal government.

In the past, NCSSMA has been consulted by both Jane Ross and Cindy Fagnoni and their respective staffs when studies were underway relating directly and indirectly to Social Security service delivery issues. In fact, the loss of supervisors in the field and the impact of the supervisory ratio target are problems which I personally raised with Ms. Fagnoni earlier this year in regard to her work on management challenges facing our agency.

We are therefore very interested in the study you are now initiating, and we are eager to contribute to your work in this area at an appropriate point in the process. I am in Washington from time to time and would very much like an opportunity to speak directly with you or your staff. Our Executive Committee includes the regional Association Presidents from all ten federal regions. Any or all of them would be able to share with you the concerns and views of their region's supervisors. We could also arrange interviews with individual supervisors if that would be helpful.

I look forward to hearing from you or your staff either directly at the above address and phone, or through Ms. Garry, at (301) 770-1850. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ron Niesing  
NCSSMA President