

NCSSMA President's Midterm Report for 2005-2006 Term
by Rick Warsinskey

Thus far NCSSMA has experienced a very busy and productive year. The purpose of this report is to provide you with an overview of NCSSMA's activities for the first half of the year. You can find more detail about most of these issues on our webpage at www.NCSSMA.org if a particular area spikes your interest. I am sure you will find that we have been very active in pursuing your concerns which is why it is so important that you communicate your concerns to us and provide ongoing feedback. We need membership input to ensure that we are pursuing the right issues in the right manner.

I started my term as President by appointing new chairs for our Committees and ensuring that the resolutions passed at the San Diego meeting were properly assigned for action. One of my key concerns has been improving our grassroots efforts to achieve a favorable budget for the Agency. This has been particularly challenging as the law prohibits our ability to communicate using agency telephones and email. We have set up home email networks and I have made several trips to Capitol Hill on my own time to meet with key personnel. I met with several staffers on November 30 to express our budget and staffing needs. Greg Heineman, NCSSMA Vice President and I spent 2 days in February talking to people on the Senate Finance Committee, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, House Social Security Subcommittee, House Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee, Senate Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee and the Senate Budget Committee. On March 14, I testified before the Senate Finance Committee and then before the House Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee on March 29. It is hopeful that we will achieve at least the President's recommended level of funding for Fiscal Year 2007 and perhaps receive additional funding through a Fiscal Year 2006 supplemental appropriations bill.

In the late fall of 2005, we submitted 14 ideas to DCO to assist field and TSC management and followed up on the Timewasters Memo that had been sent in April of 2004. It was clear from the responses we received that serious consideration is being given to our suggestions and the announcement of the elimination of the FO P/E Inventory was certainly cause for celebration. We were also successful in getting the required minimum number of Service Observations in the TSCs reduced from 5 to 3 per employee.

Greg Heineman and I met with Commissioner Barnhart and Linda McMahon on February 17, 2006. Our discussion primarily focused on the budget situation and what we could do to help achieve a positive budget. We also briefly mentioned the problems arising from the enumeration changes that came out of IRTPA and let them know that we would be sending in a letter outlining our concerns.

Between November and April the NCSSMA has been active in reviewing various proposed changes to POMS, PMS, forms, training and position descriptions. We submitted comments on many of these proposals including the new TSC MSS position description which we were very excited to see finally coming to fruition. NCSSMA and

the TSC Representative have been working on improving the TSC management structure for a few years now and it was great to see something positive happening. We also commented on the National Representative Payee Training Package, the draft PMS S430_1 chapter on the Performance Assessment and Communications System (PACS) and the declaration of telephone call data as a system of records. Feedback was provided on a POMS rewrite involving the EVID screen and the role of SRs as well as a POMS transmittal on evidence of age for enumeration. Additionally, comments were submitted on the proposed revised instructions for SS5s, the productivity factors to be used for the FY 2008 budget submission, and proposed changes to the FCIP process which could hamper our ability to hire the people the most qualified applicants.

We were invited to participate in several workgroups this year which is great for the organization. This provides an important opportunity to provide front line experience and insight. Peggy Buchanan was appointed to the E-Gov Front-Line Advisory Group while Greg Heineman was assigned to work on the PACS Planning and Implementation Workgroup. Brian Gostomski is currently representing NCSSMA on an Office of Training workgroup responsible for developing a strategic plan for crossover training and generalist training which have been on our wish list for quite some time now. Judi Lange replaced Karen Sims on the FO/PSC/TSC/OHA/DDS Workgroup which met in Denver this year. They strive to improve communications between components and streamline work processes. In April, Tony Pezza was nominated to the Office of Labor-Management and Employee Relations workgroup which is looking at several LMR issues. The regional presidents were invited to send a participant to the regionally held Numerics Focus Groups that were gathering information for the use of numerics in our new performance assessment system. And finally, Bruce Fraley will be representing NCSSMA on the DCO Operating Plan Workgroup this year. We have been participating on this workgroup for the last three years.

In early January we alerted DCO to the problems we were experiencing in the field offices and TSCs with Medicare Part D and the new enumeration evidence requirements that resulted from IRTPA. We later participated in a conference call with Bea Disman to brief her on the Part D problems we were seeing so that she could work with CMS to resolve them. We followed up on the enumeration evidence changes with a letter requesting implementation of Electronic Verification of Vital Evidence (EVVE) that had been successfully piloted in a few states as a way to expedite the process of collateral verification. We later sent a second letter outlining other issues confronting us as a result of these changes. We requested PI/PR materials to help educate the public on the changes and made suggestions for POMS modifications that would help us. In addition, we requested that CHIP be updated as quickly as possible for the TSCs with the new rules and that the TSCs be given more offnet time for training on this subject.

The Automation Committee continues to host periodic conference calls with OAS in our ongoing effort to improve automation. These have been very helpful. NCSSMA also sent a letter to Mark Blatchford, Associate Commissioner for OAS, with suggestions to improve MI Central. We continue to have representatives involved in some workgroups dealing with automation issues.

In March we activated a new NCSSMA corporate sponsorship policy with primary responsibility being assigned to the Finance Committee and a Corporate Sponsorship Officer. I appointed Judy Teixeira from the San Francisco region to this newly created position on April 3rd.

In the area of telephone services, we provided an update on our experience with the service provided by GTI in response to field office telephone problems. Service has been an ongoing problem for many field offices and we continue to work with DCO to improve it. At every opportunity we urge DCO to accelerate the plans for telephone systems replacement.

NCSSMA joined the Government Managers Coalition this year to work cooperatively in Washington D.C. on several issues including the expansion to a 2 year probationary period and a proposal to provide some compensation for unused sick leave under FERS to encourage employees to use it more carefully. I also met with the Federal Managers Association to explore common interests.

All and all it has been a productive year so far as we continue to strive to improve our ability to provide the service we feel the public deserves. We need your input and guidance in this mission so please send us your feedback.