



## SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

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Refer To: [Claimant Name]

Office of Hearings Operations  
[Local Hearing Office address]  
Tel: [Local Office Phone]  
Fax: [Local office Fax]

[Notice Date]

### COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Hearing Changes

[Representative Name]

[Representative Address]

Due to the COVID-19 national public health emergency, we are currently conducting hearings only by telephone, with the claimant's consent. To determine whether a claimant consents to a telephone hearing, we have been calling the claimant's representative pursuant to our COVID Enhanced Outreach process. However, we are updating our outreach process for cases in which the claimant is represented. We will now provide the enclosed COVID-19 Telephone Hearing Agreement Form to the representative instead of calling the representative. The claimant or representative will indicate on the form if the claimant agrees to a hearing by telephone, and if so, to provide phone numbers for the hearing. If the claimant is unable to sign the form due to COVID-19 precautions, the representative may sign in lieu of the claimant. We will not schedule, or proceed with a hearing by telephone until we receive the claimant's consent. We also will accept a verbal agreement to appear by telephone. To provide a verbal agreement, please call us at the number in the heading of this notice. If the claimant does not consent to appear by telephone, we will not schedule the hearing at this time, or if already scheduled, we will postpone the hearing until we can offer another option, such as a hearing by video teleconferencing or in person, as appropriate.

#### Waiver of Timely Mailed Notice of Hearing

We generally must mail a notice of hearing at least 75 days, or an amended notice of hearing at least 20 days, before the date of the hearing. If circumstances prevent us from mailing this notice timely, we cannot proceed with the hearing unless the claimant waives his or her right to a timely mailed notice of hearing or amended notice of hearing. As applicable, we will mail a Waiver of Timely Written Notice of Hearing form for completion.

#### How to Submit Documents to Us

In our efforts to maintain service during the COVID-19 national public health emergency, we are emphasizing electronic options for doing business with us when possible to make it more convenient to the public and to reduce paper mail and faxes in our hearing offices. Registered representatives with a recognized notice of appointment in a case should continue to use the **"Upload New File" function** available when viewing a claimant's electronic folder in Appointed Representative Services (ARS) to upload documents, including the COVID-19 Telephone Hearing Agreement Form or the Waiver of Timely Written Notice of Hearing form.

This process does not require a barcode. Alternatively, representatives can also submit documents with a barcode using the “Send Individual Response” function in ARS and Electronic Records Express (ERE). Registered representatives should use these methods to submit any documents to us electronically, whenever possible.

If a representative is not registered, he or she can use a physical **fax machine or his or her own e-fax** solution to send documents, including the completed COVID-19 Telephone Hearing Agreement Form or the Waiver of Timely Written Notice of Hearing form. Due to our modernization efforts, sending documents to us via fax will now deliver a secure, electronic copy and route it to the specific hearing office’s designated email inbox. To submit documents electronically via fax, simply use the toll-free fax number with area code “833” assigned to the servicing hearing office, included in the header of this notice. For a specific hearing office’s designated fax number, visit [https://www.ssa.gov/appeals/ho\\_locator.html](https://www.ssa.gov/appeals/ho_locator.html).

For appointed representatives who do not have direct access to the electronic file, we can provide an encrypted copy of the electronic file by email. Please call us at the number in the heading of this notice to provide an email address for receipt of the electronic file.

### **Submitting the Notice of Appointment Electronically**

Representatives who are not yet appointed to a case but are registered through ARS can use the “Contact OHO Office” function to send a one-way communication, including non-case information or the written notice of appointment, such as the SSA-1696, to a designated email box for the servicing hearing office. We highly recommend that any representative who will appear at a claimant’s hearing but is not yet appointed in the case submit appointment documentation before the hearing.

For an appointment of representative to be valid, the claim(s) file must contain a completed and properly signed notice of appointment, which can be on form SSA-1696, Claimant’s Appointment of Representative, or another written document that meets the requirements of 20 CFR 404.1707 and 416.1507. Form SSA-1696 is accessible on the Social Security website at <https://www.ssa.gov/forms/ssa-1696.pdf>. Additional information about use of the “Contact OHO Office” tool can be found at <https://www.ssa.gov/ar>.

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, we are temporarily permitting claimant signatures on a notice of appointment that do not meet the standards listed in GN 03910.040 (e.g., signatures that appear to be electronic or a digitized image of a handwritten signature) with additional verbal confirmation by the claimant about his or her intent to appoint the representative and electronic signature. A fee agreement with a claimant signature identical to the one on the written notice of appointment may be accepted if it is submitted simultaneously with notice of appointment.

### **If You Have Any Questions**

If you have any questions, please contact your servicing hearing office via the contact information in the heading of this notice.

Social Security Administration

cc: [Claimant Name]  
[Claimant Address]  
[OBO Name]  
[OBO Address]

Enclosure(s):  
Telephone Hearing Agreement Form

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