

General Casework FAQ's

Q: The agency has denied my claim/application. Can you help me appeal the decision?

A: While my office can make an inquiry on your behalf about the status of a pending case, or for clarification on the reasons for a denial, it would be inappropriate for me to compel any agency to decide an issue in your favor, or to overturn a decision that is final. You should first contact the agency for information on your appeal options if your case has been denied.

Q: Can you help me expedite my claim or application with a Federal agency?

A: Each agency has set criteria for considering expedite requests. You should first contact the agency/office where your claim or application is being processed directly to determine what is required for the agency to consider expediting your case. If you have trouble contacting the agency, please send the request, along with the evidence showing a need for expedited attention, to my casework staff. Please refer to the "tips for requesting casework assistance" (below) for more information. Please call my San Francisco office with any questions.

Q: Can I request casework for a matter involving an agency under the jurisdiction of the State or County?

A: As a U.S. Senator, my staff has access to liaison offices for all U.S. Federal agencies. For assistance with a non-federal agency or department, you should write to your representatives in the California State Senate or State Assembly, or contact the office of the Governor. The staffers at these offices have more direct access to non-federal agencies and can better review your concerns and respond to your letter.

Q: Can you help me with my legal case or court hearing?

A: Senate rules prohibit me and my staff from giving legal advice or intervening in court proceedings. If you are seeking assistance with a case that involves a lawsuit or that is pending litigation and you need help finding an attorney, please refer to the following organizations: The American Bar Association Correspondence Unit, (312) 988-5522 OR www.LawHelpCalifornia.org for low-income Californians OR the American Immigration Lawyers Association, www.aila.org for immigration cases.

Q: Can you help me with predatory lending or a pending home foreclosure?

A: Please review the "Subprime Mortgage Crisis" page on my web site, or the HUD website for tips on navigating the issue of predatory lending and/or foreclosures, <http://hud.gov/> . If, after exploring these options, you do write to me about your case, please be sure to include your loan number, lender name and any recent statements or letters you have received from your lender regarding the status of your loan.

Q: Why do you need my complete Social Security number?

A: When my staff contacts a federal agency on your behalf, our liaison at that agency will need to verify your identity and retrieve information connected to your case in order to address your concerns. In most cases, the best way to verify your identity and to look up your case history is

with your Social Security number. For immigration cases, an alien registration number or passport number is preferred.

Q: Where can I get information on federal grants?

A: Please review the information “Government Assistance” page of my website for information on grants. If you would like my office to send you a Federal Grants Guide booklet, please call us with your request. You can also visit <http://www.grants.gov/> for more information.

Tips for requesting casework assistance

It is always recommended that you try to resolve a problem directly with the agency involved before contacting my office. If you need additional assistance after contacting the agency yourself, please write to me to the attention of my casework staff in San Francisco. Please do not submit an e-mail.

Below you will find a few agency specific tips to keep in mind when requesting casework help. Feel free to call my San Francisco office at (415) 393-0707 if you have any additional questions.

Department of Veterans Affairs - <http://www.va.gov/>

- In order to contact a VA Regional Office regarding benefits, the veteran must already have an active claim pending at the VARO. If you have not yet filed a claim, you can contact the VA directly for information on how to do so.
- The VA requires a signed Privacy Release Form for us to obtain information on a case.
- Expediting claims for benefits will be considered if the veteran is going to be homeless and has a letter from his landlord with an intent to evict, or if there is an imminent medical emergency.

Department of Defense - <http://www.dod.gov/>

- My staff does not review requests for recommendations for military service.
- The DOD and all branches of the military require signed authorization from the service member in order to release information regarding his/her case. Please include a signature with your request for casework assistance.

Internal Revenue Service - <http://www.irs.gov/>

- In order for my office to open an inquiry with the IRS, you must complete a Privacy Release Form. You must also include your social security number and list the relevant tax years which you are disputing.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services - <http://www.uscis.gov/>

- All expedite requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and are granted at the discretion of the agency Director. The criteria are: Severe financial loss to company or individual, extreme emergent situation, humanitarian situation, nonprofit status of requesting organization in furtherance of the cultural and social interests of the United States, Department of Defense national interest situation, USCIS error, compelling interest of USCIS.

- Cases pending an “FBI NAME CHECK”:

The expedite criteria listed above does not apply. My staff will be happy to assist you in following up on the status of your pending name check if your case has been pending with the FBI for at least one year. We are very much aware of the delays and inconveniences that result from the FBI name check process, however, please keep in mind that the FBI cannot determine when your name check will be completed. The USCIS has issued a press release, available on the agency’s website, regarding this process.

- Employment-Based I-485 Applications:

If you are requesting assistance with an employment based I-485 please include the priority date and receipt number of the I-140 petition attached to your case. If you have more than one valid I-140 petition and you would like them to be cross charged or interfiled, please make sure to include the priority date, receipt number, and country charge of each I-140 petition.

U.S. Department of State – <http://www.travel.state.gov/>

- Visa cases pending a “security clearance”:

This is not the same as an FBI name check. My staff can check on the status of your case, but will not be able to request an expedite or waiver of mandatory clearance procedures.

- If you are writing about a denied non-immigrant visa case, please keep in mind that there is no appeal option for such cases. If the applicant is still interested in visiting the U.S. he/she should be prepared to reapply directly with the Consulate/Embassy.

- U.S. Citizens Travelling Abroad:

It is always recommended that you register your trip with the Department of State. Please visit http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html for more information. If you are writing to me about your concerns with a U.S. Citizen who is currently abroad, please include that person’s full name and passport number or date of birth.

Housing and Urban Development - <http://www.hud.gov/>

- Steps you can take to obtain federally subsidized housing:

1. Contact your local housing authority or your nearest housing counseling office.
2. Find out if their Section 8 wait list is open. If so, fill out an application and make sure to indicate any preferences that are applicable (these vary per Housing Authority)
3. Request a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) subsidized housing booklet. The HUD website also lists subsidized apartments in your area.

- The waitlist for HUD subsidized apartments tends to be much shorter than Section 8 waitlists. It is recommended that you apply to as many properties as possible and to expand your search to other areas. This will maximize your chances of finding an opening faster.

Transportation Security Administration - <http://www.tsa.gov/>

- If you believe your name appears in error on a TSA or other government watch list, my office can assist you in making a claim with TSA through the Traveler Redress Inquiry Program (TRIP). However, please note that TSA does not guarantee that making a TRIP claim will

eliminate all future travel difficulties. You may access the TSA TRIP form through the following link: http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/DHSTRIP_Traveler_Inquiry_Form.pdf

Social Security Administration - <http://www.ssa.gov/>

- Please be as clear as possible when outlining your concerns with SSA. The agency will only be able to address your concerns as they are outlined in your letter to me.

- All requests for assistance with SSA must include the person's name, contact information, Social Security number, and a Privacy Release Form. This form must be signed by the person involved, or proof of Power of Attorney must be provided. It is helpful if you include copies of recent correspondence with the agency.

- Expedite Requests:

Please refer to the SSA's Hearings, Appeals and Litigation Law Manual (HALLEX) for more explicit qualifications: http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/hallex/I-02/I-2-1-40.html. If you would like to apply for expedited processing, please provide my office with evidence and documentation, as outlined by HALLEX, demonstrating why you need your case expedited.

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) - <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/>

- Please be as clear as possible when outlining your concerns with CMS. The agency will only be able to address your concerns as they are outlined in your letter to me.

- All requests for assistance from Medicare beneficiaries (those receiving benefits through Medicare) must include the participant's name, contact information, Social Security number, and a signed Privacy Release Form. This form must be signed by the person involved, or proof of Power of Attorney must be provided. It is helpful if you include copies of recent correspondence with the agency.

- Medicare service providers:

Please include the provider's name and contact information, as well as a National Provider Identifier number, Provider Transaction Access Number, email address, business hours, tax ID, and any additional information or documents applicable to the issue. It is helpful if you include copies of recent correspondence with the agency.