



AALJ Says Unsafe, Unhealthy Federal Workplace Exposes Larger Issues with Social Security Administration

WASHINGTON — Nov. 19, 2019 — The [Association of Administrative Law Judges](#) (AALJ), the union representing Administrative Law Judges in the Social Security Administration, says unsafe and unhealthy working conditions at the Tulsa Hearing Office in Oklahoma are disturbing examples of the agency’s overall lack of concern for jurists and the public.

A bedbug infestation and high levels of carbon dioxide have been confirmed at the Hearing Office located at the Eastgate Metroplex at 14002 E. 2151 St., Suite 1140, in Tulsa.

For months several employees, including judges, have complained of headaches, burning and itching eyes, fatigue, and upper respiratory and other ear, nose and throat issues. A subsequent U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services inspection determined that the air quality in the hearing office, especially the hearing rooms, is at unacceptable levels.

The union reports SSA employees also have found bedbugs in the lobby, conference rooms used by representatives and claimants, and cubicles and offices on multiple occasions for over a year. Representatives have discovered bedbugs on their clothing after attending a hearing. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration investigated and issued a ruling of an “unsafe or unhealthful work conditions.”

AALJ President Judge Melissa McIntosh says, “Social Security Deputy Commissioner Theresa Gruber flew to Tulsa to take control of this situation, yet her leadership to date has been ineffective. Subjecting judges, staff, representatives and claimants to these levels of carbon dioxide is medically irresponsible. Knowingly exposing judges, staff and members of the public to bedbugs is unacceptable. We immediately call on SSA to relocate the hearing office until both issues are resolved.”

The Tulsa situation fits into a more wide-ranging and troubling approach by SSA to Administrative Law Judges and its union:

- The Federal Labor Relations Authority has preliminarily concluded that SSA, including Deputy Commissioner Gruber, illegally attempted to intimidate union leaders;
- Forty-seven U.S. Senators sent [an official letter](#) to SSA Commissioner Andrew Saul stating their “dismay that the Social Security Administration (SSA) refuses to bargain in good faith with union representatives”; and
- The AALJ argues that the Federal Service Impasses Panel is not constitutionally appointed and can’t take jurisdiction over its collective bargaining agreement dispute with SSA.

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