



STATE OF ARKANSAS
**Department of Finance
and Administration**

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November 18, 2015

Senator Uvalde Lindsey, Co-Chairperson
Representative Lanny Fite, Co-Chairperson
Uniform Personnel Classification and
Compensation Plan Subcommittee
Arkansas Legislative Council
State Capitol Building, Room 315
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

Dear Co-Chairs:

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) submits a request from the Disability Determination for Social Security Administration (DDSSA) for your review.

DDSSA has requested the establishment of a new title, DDSSA Program Education Coordinator, at a grade C123.

Between 2007-2015, the DDSSA has hired 15 classes of Adjudicators ranging in size from 6-127 employees and totaling approximately 307 employees. Due to the extensive knowledge and dedication required, as well as the rigorous benchmarks set forth by the agency and Federal DDS, the success rate for Adjudicators depends greatly on their continuing education. The turnover rate for the adjudicator classifications in the last 5 years at DDSSA is 35.3%. Each new class of adjudicators goes through 12-18 months of training, during which time they learn the most basic case types. As they progress through the career path, they are expected to become more experienced and to handle more complex cases. Each new skill, therefore, requires new courses, more extensive training, peer mentoring, and performance evaluations.

The DDSSA requests this new title to assign one position the responsibilities of training and mentoring all employees, whether it is initial training, remedial training, or continuing education. This position would be located in a newly separated Training Department at the agency and would be tasked with overseeing the recently developed Continuing Disability Review Task Force, which will save taxpayers over half a billion dollars over the next five years. It will report directly to the Program Director of training, quality assurance, and hearings, as well as to the Director of Operations to allow coordination of all departments and ensure greater success for adjudicators.

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After review, OPM recommends the establishment of the DDSSA Program Education Coordinator, grade C123, classification. Your consideration of this request is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Kay Barnhill
State Personnel Administrator



Chief Fiscal Officer of the State

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Date

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STATE OF ARKANSAS
Disability Determination for Social Security Administration

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ASA HUTCHINSON
Governor

ARTHUR BOUTIETTE
Director

October 30, 2015

Kay B. Terry, State Personnel Administrator
Department of Finance and Administration
1509 West Seventh Street, Suite 205
Little Rock, AR 72203-3278

Dear Kay:

I write this letter to provide some history and background for Social Security Disability's request to establish a new classification of DDSSA Program Education Coordinator, Grade C123.

Between June 2007 and September 2015, DDSSA hired 15 classes of new Disability Adjudicators. The classes ranged in size from six to 127 trainees, and totaled 307 employees during this period of approximately eight years. There were two main reasons for this influx of adjudicators. The first reason was the age of our adjudicative staff. Ten years ago, 70% of our adjudicators had at least five years of experience, and many had been with the DDS for over 20 years. We began to lose this experienced staff to retirement. Then, in 2009, the Social Security Administration approached our agency with an astounding request. We were asked to pioneer a new concept in disability adjudication. Due to the nation's aging population, along with very significant limitations in hiring and maintaining staff in DDSs in some states, SSA proposed establishing Extended Service Teams (ESTs). The concept of the EST was to create DDSs that would act as national resources, assisting those states who were unable to handle the disability claims for their population. Arkansas DDS responded to this request, and established the first and largest EST in the nation. Since conception, the Arkansas EST has processed over 165,000 disability claims from other states, providing much needed assistance to some of the nation's most vulnerable populations.

Due to these changes, the DDS faces new challenges. With the loss of staff, the agency lost a wealth of knowledge, experience, and peer mentoring capability. The addition of so many adjudicators during a relatively brief period created the need for even more training. The training period for an Adjudicator I is 12 to 18 months, during which they are instructed on only the most basic case types. As adjudicators progress along the expected career path, they must become proficient in increasingly difficult and more complex skills and case types. Each new skill, of course, requires extensive training, mentoring, and evaluation of performance.

Due to the increasing number of Social Security Disability claim receipts over the last eight years, along with the previously mentioned challenges, the DDS found it necessary to reorganize and initiate a short range planning committee. Results of the study prepared by that committee were submitted to OPM. The key recommendation of the planning committee's final report was to create a continuing education program, which will expand our existing training program for new employees, offer additional training to experienced staff and provide remedial education to employees who are deficient in specific areas. This classification request is for the leader of that initiative. This leader will also be tasked with the oversight of the EST's business processes with Texas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Additionally, he/she will oversee the newly developed Continuing Disability Review Task Force, which will save taxpayers approximately half a billion dollars over the next five years.

The training and mentoring of all employees in the Operations Department is the responsibility of the Program Director of Training, Quality Assurance, and Hearings. This Program Director has been allowed the addition of only one Training Department employee during this time, and that employee had to be shared with the Program Director of Operations. As a result of all of these things, the addition of a new section devoted to Continuing Education has become vital to the accomplishment of the DDS's mission and goals. The Training Department needs to consist of two sections, each dedicated to a singular purpose: training new employees and continuing education. The creation of the Continuing Education Section demands the addition of a management position to oversee the entire Training Department. This position will oversee training, mentoring, and continuing education, and report directly to the Program Director of Training, Quality Assurance, and Hearings as well as to the Program Director of Operations. This will allow coordination of all agency training activities with both departments, foster greater development of staff, and ensure the agency has continued success.

In essence, DDSSA is requesting approval to downgrade our existing Grade C125 position 22095413, DDSSA Assistant Director – Quality Assurance to a new classification of DDSSA Program Education Coordinator, Grade C123. Your positive review and that of the Legislature would be greatly appreciated. If I can answer any further questions, I am at your and the committee's disposal to do so.

Respectfully,

Arthur Bouliette
Director

"AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER"