

Messrs. Jeff Fager, Bill Owens and Steve Kroft  
60 Minutes  
CBS  
524 W 57th St  
New York, NY



Gentlemen:

CBS's *60 Minutes* deservedly prides itself on high journalistic standards and sharp investigative reporting, and for decades has played a valuable role by exposing serious flaws in otherwise well-regarded institutions and programs. However, the CBS *60 Minutes* broadcast on the Social Security disability program that aired last Sunday, October 6<sup>th</sup>, painted a misleading and inaccurate picture of an important program which serves as a vital lifeline for millions of Americans with severe disabilities and chronic conditions.

We wholeheartedly agree that it is essential to investigate, discover and end abuses and misspending in government programs including Social Security. The Social Security Disability Insurance program is critical for people with disabilities and chronic conditions and we commend efforts to find fraud and prevent those not deserving its services from abusing the system. However, by highlighting only alleged fraud, without the broader context of the millions of individuals who rightly receive and so wholly rely on benefits, your report inaccurately cast the entire Social Security disability program in a bad light.

The single most authoritative source of information on the Social Security disability program's policies, operations and trends is without question the Social Security Administration itself. A thorough and complete presentation must include the perspective of the agency's officials and experts. Another valuable and important source of information on Social Security disability programs that was overlooked are people with disabilities themselves, who have been through the rigorous application process, with six in ten being rejected. The Social Security disability standard is incredibly strict; demonstrating eligibility requires extensive medical evidence, and even people with *severe* disabilities can wait months if not years to receive benefits. Many individuals are denied despite significant disabilities and chronic conditions such as multiple sclerosis (MS), the most common neurological disease leading to disability in young adults.

Media coverage – particularly from a respected program such as *60 Minutes* – can have real consequences and can lead to needless harm to an extremely vulnerable population. The wellbeing and economic security of millions of people with disabilities and their families – for whom Social Security disability benefits are nothing short of a lifeline – hang in the balance. We hope that *60 Minutes* will supplement its reporting on these vital programs with completeness – by providing needed context, balance and essential facts about the disability program from additional, important sources.

If you have any questions or would like to possibly speak with someone living with multiple sclerosis who receives SSDI, please don't hesitate to contact me by phone at 202-408-1500 or by email at [Ted.Thompson@nmss.org](mailto:Ted.Thompson@nmss.org) or reach out to my colleague Arney Rosenblat, whose contact information is below.

Thank you for taking time to consider our view on this issue.

Sincerely,

Ted Thompson  
Vice President, Federal Government Relations  
National Multiple Sclerosis Society

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