



News Release

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security Modernizing its Disability Program

Decades Old Rule Updated to Reflect Today's Workforce

Social Security Commissioner Andrew Saul announced a new final rule today, modernizing an agency disability rule that was introduced in 1978 and has remained unchanged. The new regulation, “Removing the Inability to Communicate in English as an Education Category,” updates a disability rule that was more than 40 years old and did not reflect work in the modern economy. This final rule has been in the works for a number of years and updates an antiquated policy that makes the inability to communicate in English a factor in awarding disability benefits.

“It is important that we have an up-to-date disability program,” Commissioner Saul said. “The workforce and work opportunities have changed and outdated regulations need to be revised to reflect today’s world.”

A successful disability system must evolve and support the right decision as early in the process as possible. Social Security’s disability rules must continue to reflect current medicine and the evolution of work.

Social Security is required to consider education to determine if someone’s medical condition prevents work, but research shows the inability to communicate in English is no longer a good measure of educational attainment or the ability to engage in work. This rule is another important step in the agency’s efforts to modernize its disability programs.

In 2015, Social Security’s Inspector General recommended that the agency evaluate the appropriateness of this policy. Social Security owes it to the American public to ensure that its disability programs continue to reflect the realities of the modern workplace. This rule also supports the Administration’s longstanding focus of recognizing that individuals with disabilities can remain in the workforce.

The rule will be effective on April 27, 2020.

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