# How to Prepare for a Hearing









If you've been denied Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), it's critical that you work with your legal team for your

It will take **understanding, teamwork, dedication, and communication** in preparing for a successful hearing.

appeal in order to best

prepare for your hearing.

Once you learn the process, you can lead your team to a win. Where do you start?

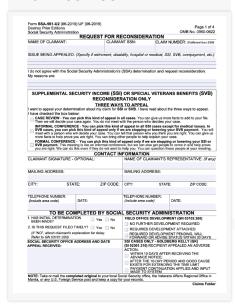


## **Understand Your Denial**

There are several grounds on which a claim can be denied. For medical reasons, you'll need to provide additional medical information on your appeal to build your case before your hearing. This could include doctor opinions. You'll need to complete the following three forms:

## the request for reconsideration

#### Form SSA-561



### the Disability Report, Appeal

#### Form SSA-3441



## the Authorization to Disclose

#### Form SSA-827



In those cases, you'll need to provide additional information for your appeal but will still need to fill out the request for reconsideration, Form SSA-561.

Once you've retained your attorney and filed your appeal, keep in mind that there are many more steps to complete to get you to a hearing. Most importantly, don't be discouraged-most people are denied at the first two levels of review (the initial and reconsideration levels). This is based strictly on objective, public available data. Keep in mind, there will usually be more paperwork at each step of the process. another reason to have representation help at each level of review.

NOTE: If you file online, you are technically filling out the SSA-561 and SSA-3441 at once.

If you're denied for non-medical reasons, it could be because:

- You did not work long enough to receive disability benefits.
- You disagree that you received an overpayment that the SSA says you received.
- You did not qualify to receive benefits under your spouse or family member.



# **Understand the Levels of Appeal**

If you were denied SSDI or SSI, you may request an appeal. Generally, you have 60 days after you receive the notice of our decision to ask for any type of appeal. There are four levels of appeal:

- Reconsideration
- Hearing by an administrative law judge
- Review by the Appeals Council
- Federal Court review





# **Preparing takes Teamwork**

Abraham Lincoln famously said, "Give me six hours to cut down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe." You want to know well ahead of your hearing the strategy your attorney will navigate on your behalf. When you're working with your legal team to prepare for your hearing, keep this in mind. Everything you do to prepare for the next step is crucial.



Administrative work can feel tedious as a claimant, but teamwork and attention to detail are the most critical parts of your case at this point. The first thing you and your legal team will do once you request review of a denial will be to review

the file with dedication. If denied at Reconsideration, In preparing for the hearing, your attorney will need to make sure that your old records are correct and complete. If anything is missing, now is the time to track down replacement

documents. Your attorney can work on your behalf, but your attorney and their staff rely on you to provide them the names of your medical providers, so they can gather those records.

Your new documents must also be correct and complete. Your attorney will hopefully seek out opinion statements from your doctors to make sure you have everything you need.

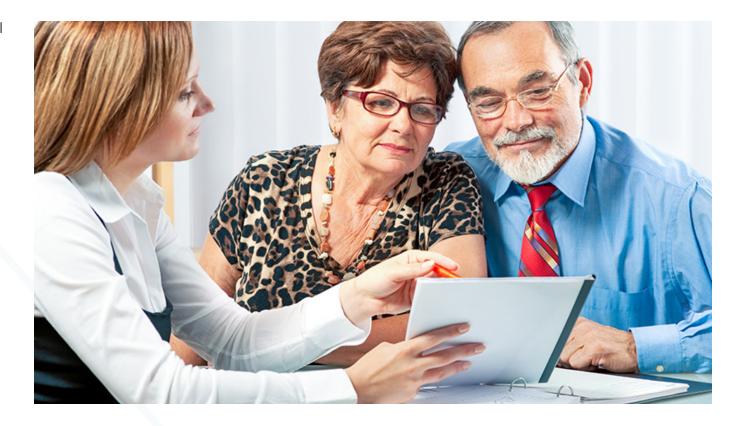
TIP: Once your hearing notice arrives, you typically have a 75-day window to prepare. Hopefully, your legal team is in the home stretch at this point in developing your file.



# **Communicate with Your Legal Team**

It's critical at this point that you alert your attorney of any and all changes in your contact information. Have you been hospitalized? Changed or new doctor? Has your cell phone number changed? Have you moved to a new physical address? These are details that your attorney needs to know, and you or authorized loved-ones are the people that can provide those updates to your attorney's office.

Any changes in your medical condition since your initial or reconsideration level will be vital evidence for your hearing. Make sure you've communicated with your legal team.





## **Dedicate Yourself to the Process**

At this point, you and your legal team will create a game plan and a map for success. Will your hearing be in person or via Video Teleconferencing (VTC)? You'll need a dedicated plan in order to prepare. Most attorneys would prefer a face-to-face hearing over a VTC. If you'd like to object to a VTC hearing, you typically have 30 days to submit your objection from the date you receive certain paperwork regarding your rights. Whether in person or by VTC, the next step is to meet with your attorney for your pre-hearing conference. Again, updates and changes are important and should be communicated to each other.





# What is a Pre-Hearing Conference?

In your pre-hearing conference, your attorney will explain the laws, issues, and regulations to you. Most importantly, they will explain and answer your questions about what you can expect from the hearing process. It's normal to feel nervous and scared at this point. After all, a hearing is something you've probably never been involved in before. Keep in mind that your attorney, on the other hand, often attends three or four hearings a day. The point is, you want an attorney that will calmly listen to you, and allow you to bring out and tell your side of the story to the judge.





That's why all along the way, your attorney should keep you in the loop, answer your questions, and help explain the process to you.

## functionally affect you on a day-to-day basis. This involves your medical records + your testimony.

After your pre-hearing conference with your attorney, they'll continue to study your file vigorously. They'll handle the organization and compilation of your paperwork and

documents. At this point, you are teammates. Whatever you can do to help your attorney administratively helps you as well. You and your attorney are a team. Your attorney takes great

responsibility to help you at this point, and you should see them as your partner, with you both sitting on the same side of the table.

# The Hearing

When the day of your hearing arrives, it's normal to feel nervous. Prepare the night before so that you know what you're wearing, how you're getting to your hearing, and who is available to help you, should you need it. You'll need to arrive at least one hour before your scheduled hearing time to meet with your attorney. You will arrive at the lobby and be checked in by security.

You will hopefully be able to meet with your attorney one more time at the hearing office. Once in front of the judge, be aware that as your advocate, your attorney will present your case. The judge will ask questions. Your attorney will ask questions. A vocational expert may provide testimony as to work ability in the economy. There is no jury or gallery — it will just be a few people with necessary roles. Trust your attorney to present your case in a compelling way. After all, their goal is the same as yours — to win the benefits that you deserve. Trust yourself to tell your side of the story. As in baseball, don't try to hit a home run on every swing. Be yourself.

#### **Dos of Seeking a Disability Lawyer:**

- Reach out to an attorney sooner rather than later. However, if you're facing a hearing and are not yet represented, contact an attorney immediately. It's not too late!
- Prepare all your documents and medical records.
- Communicate all details of your case with your attorney in your prehearing conference, even if you think they're not important.
- Create a summary of your case and the details of your denial so that you can clearly explain the details to your disability lawyer.
- Continue to focus on your health and well-being.
- Trust that your attorney has your best interests in mind.

#### **Don'ts of Seeking a Disability Lawyer:**

- Don't procrastinate.
- Don't get overwhelmed we can help.
- Don't assume you can't afford an attorney. Most do not get paid unless you win.
- Don't accept the denial of your claim the majority of claims are denied.
- Don't assume you can do this on your own. It takes teamwork.







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