



SOCIAL SECURITY

Office of the Chief Actuary

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Sanders:

I am writing in response to your request for our estimates of the financial effects on Social Security of enacting the *Social Security Expansion Act*, which you introduced today. The estimates provided here reflect the intermediate assumptions of the 2022 Trustees Report.

The Bill (hereafter referred to as the proposal) includes nine provisions with direct effects on the Social Security trust funds. We have enjoyed working with Warren Gunnels and Richard Phillips of your staff in developing this proposal to meet your goals. The estimates and analysis provided here reflect the combined effort of many in the Office of the Chief Actuary, but most particularly Karen Glenn, Daniel Nickerson, Kyle Burkhalter, Anna Kirjusina, Chris Chaplain, Katie Sutton, and Tiffany Bosley.

The enclosed tables provide estimates of the effects of the nine provisions on the cost, income, and combined trust fund reserves for the Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) program, as well as estimated effects on retired worker benefit levels for selected hypothetical workers and effects of payroll tax levels. In addition, tables 1b and 1b.n provide estimates of the federal budget implications of these nine provisions with direct effects on the OASDI program.

We estimate that enactment of these provisions would extend the ability of the OASDI program to pay scheduled benefits in full and on time throughout the 75-year projection period. The date of projected depletion of the combined OASI and DI Trust Fund reserves is 2035 under current law and the intermediate assumptions of the 2022 Trustees Report.

The proposal includes nine provisions with direct effects on the OASDI program. The following list briefly describes these provisions:

Section 2. Increase the first primary insurance amount (PIA) bend point above the current-law level, and increase the first PIA factor from 90 to 95, for all OASDI benefits payable based on eligibility for January 2024 and thereafter. Increase the first PIA bend point by 22 percent for benefits payable for eligibility in 2024 and later, regardless of when any beneficiary became initially eligible. Increase the first PIA factor by 5 percentage points, for a PIA factor of 95 percent for benefit eligibility in 2024 and later.

Section 3. Use the increase in the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E) rather than the increase in the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) to calculate the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), effective for December 2025 and later COLAs. We assume this change would increase the COLA by an average of 0.2 percentage point per year.

Section 4. Increase the special minimum PIA for workers who become newly eligible for retirement or disability benefits or die in 2024 or later. For workers becoming newly eligible or dying in 2024, the minimum initial PIA for workers with 30 or more years of coverage (YOCs) is 125 percent of the annual poverty guideline for a single individual, as published by the Department of Health and Human Services for 2023, divided by 12. For workers becoming newly eligible or dying after 2024, the minimum initial PIA increases by the growth in the national average wage index (AWI).

Section 5. Continue benefits for children of disabled, or deceased workers until they attain age 22 if the child is in high school, college, or vocational school, beginning in 2024.

Sections 6 and 7. Apply the combined OASDI payroll tax rate on earnings above \$250,000, effective for 2024 and later. Tax all earnings once the current-law taxable maximum exceeds \$250,000. Do not credit the additional taxed earnings for benefit purposes.

Section 8a. Apply a separate 12.4-percent tax on investment income as defined in the Affordable Care Act (ACA), payable to the OASI and DI Trust Funds with unindexed thresholds as in the ACA, effective for 2024 and later. The ACA thresholds are \$200,000 for a single filer and \$250,000 for a married couple filing jointly. Under this provision, there is no limit on the amount taxed.

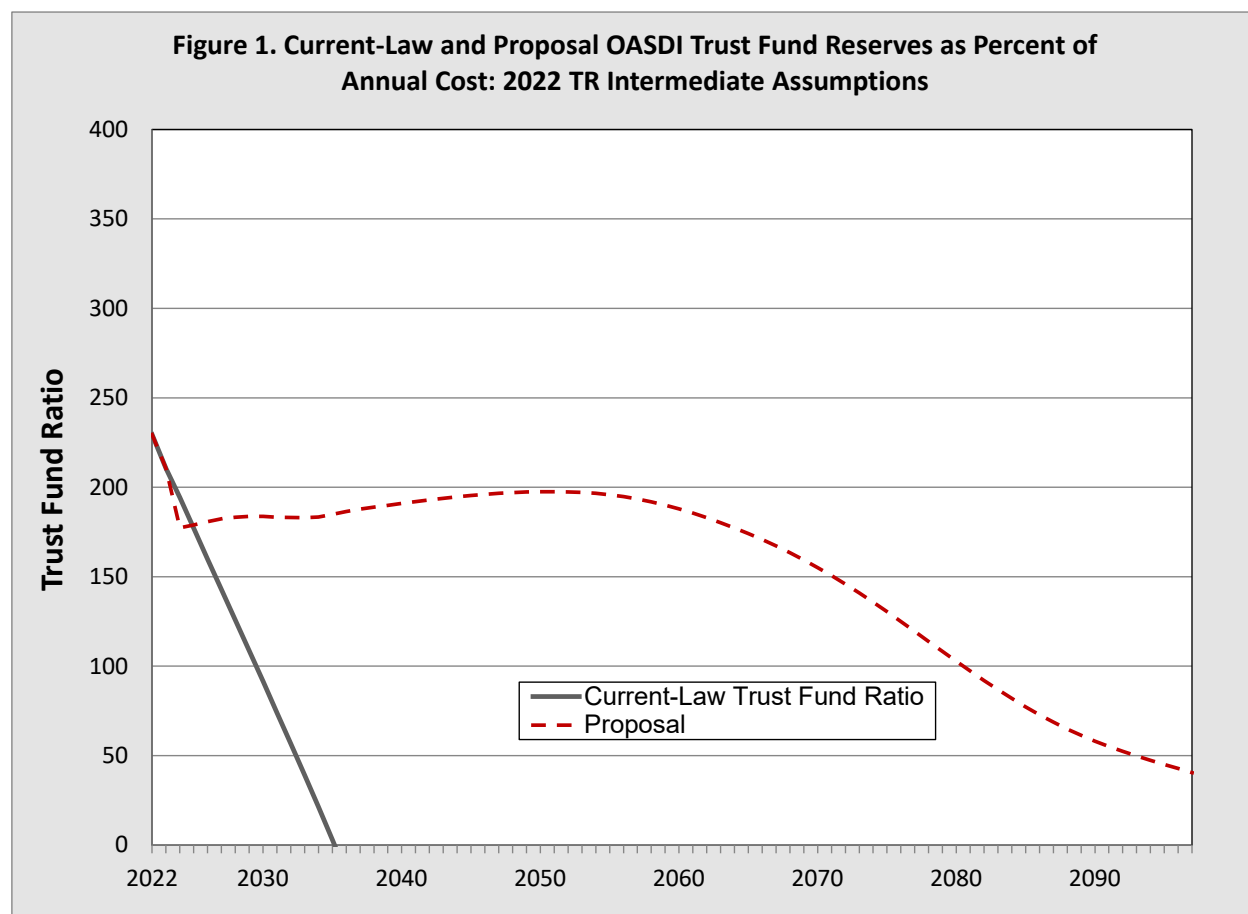
Section 8b. Apply a 16.2-percent net investment income (NII) tax on active S-corporation holders and active limited partners, effective for 2024 and later. Of the total 16.2 percent tax, 12.4 percentage points would be payable to the OASI and DI Trust Funds, and 3.8 percentage points would be payable to the General Fund of the Treasury.

Section 9. Combine the current separate Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) and Disability Insurance (DI) Trust Funds into a single Social Security Trust Fund, effective January 1, 2024.

The balance of this letter provides a summary of the effects of the nine provisions on the actuarial status of the OASDI program, our understanding of the specifications and intent of each of the nine provisions, and descriptions of our detailed financial estimates for trust fund operations, benefit levels, and implications for the federal budget. See the “Specification for Provisions of the Proposal” section of this letter for a more detailed description of these nine provisions.

Summary of Effects of the Proposal on OASDI Actuarial Status

Figure 1 illustrates the projected OASDI Trust Fund ratio through 2096 under current law and assuming enactment of the proposal. The trust fund ratio is defined as the combined OASI and DI Trust Fund reserves expressed as a percentage of annual program cost. Assuming enactment of the proposal, the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds are expected to be able to pay scheduled benefits in full and on time throughout the 75-year projection period, under the intermediate assumptions of the 2022 Trustees Report.



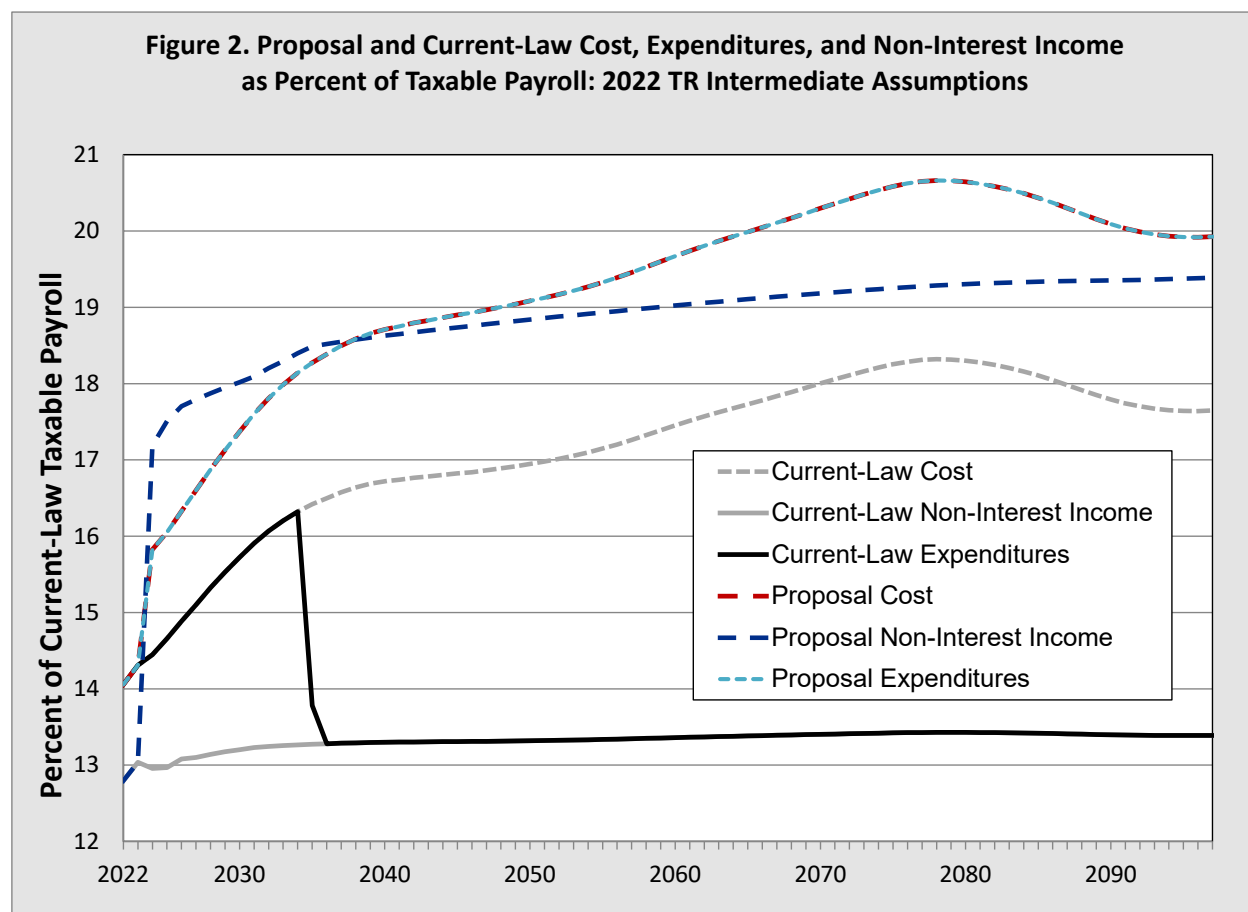
Note: *Trust Fund Ratio* for a given year is defined as the reserves in the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds at the beginning of the year expressed as a percentage of the cost of the program for the year.

Under current law, 80 percent of scheduled benefits are projected to be payable on a timely basis in 2035 after depletion of the combined trust fund reserves, with the percentage payable declining to 74 percent for 2096. Under the proposal, 100 percent of scheduled benefits are projected to be payable on a timely basis throughout the 75-year projection period.

Enactment of the nine provisions of this proposal would decrease the long-range OASDI actuarial deficit from 3.42 percent of taxable payroll under current law to 0.12 percent of payroll under the proposal.

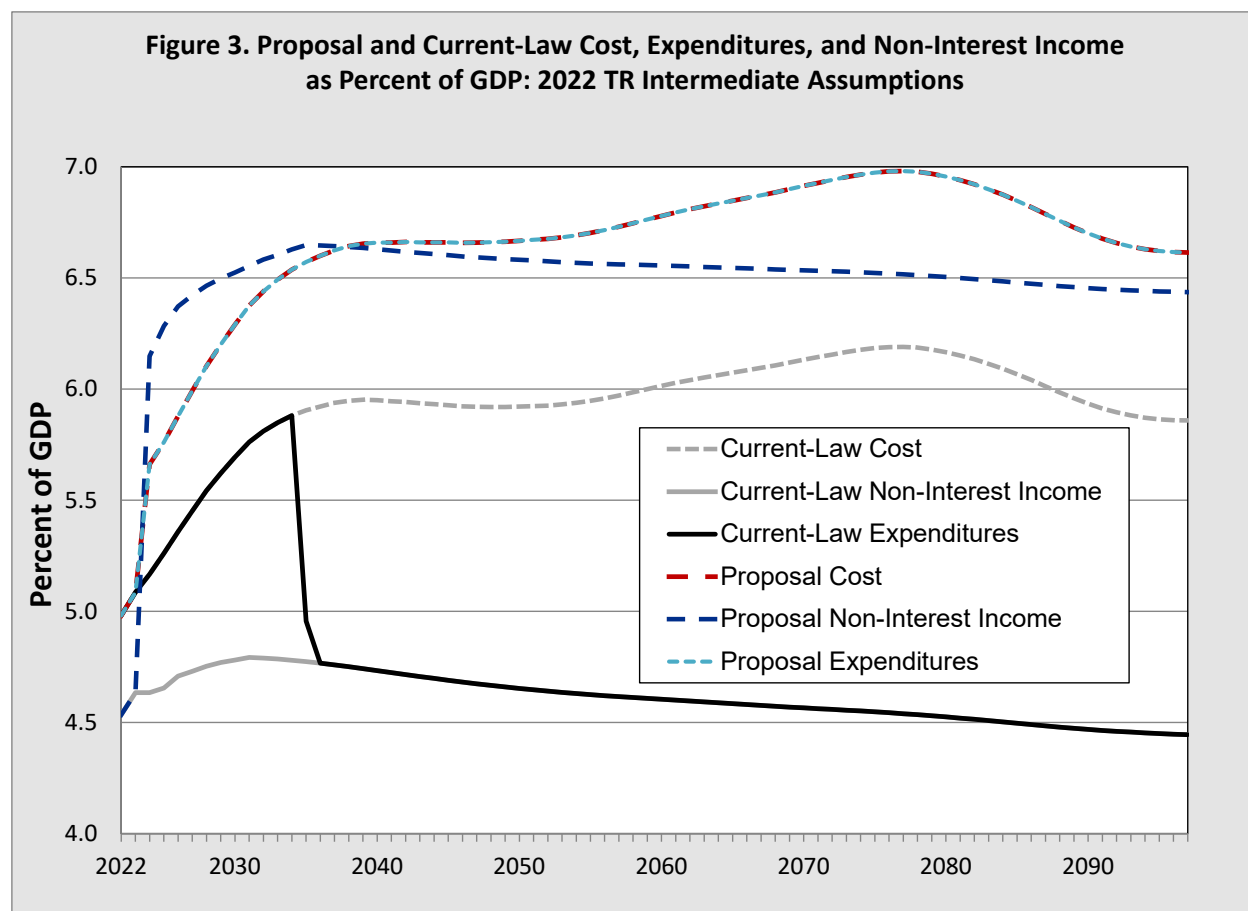
Figure 2 illustrates annual projected levels of cost, expenditures, and non-interest income as a percentage of the current-law taxable payroll. The projected level of cost reflects the full cost of

scheduled benefits under both current law and the proposal. After trust fund reserve depletion, projected expenditures under current law and under the proposal include only amounts payable from projected tax revenues (non-interest income), which are less than projected cost.



OASDI program annual cost under the proposal is higher than under current law, starting in 2024. This difference in program cost increases quickly at first, then generally increases gradually over time to about 2.3 percent of current-law payroll for 2096. Beginning in 2024, non-interest income under the proposal is projected to be higher than under current law. This difference between proposal and current-law income increases from 4.2 percent of current-law payroll for 2024 to 6.0 percent of current-law payroll for 2096. For 2024 and later, the proposal improves the annual balance (non-interest income minus program cost).

It is also useful to consider the projected cost, expenditures, and income for the OASDI program expressed as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Figure 3 illustrates these levels under both current law and the proposal.



Specification for Provisions of the Proposal

Section 2. Increase the first primary insurance amount (PIA) bend point above the current-law level, and increase the first PIA factor from 90 to 95, for all OASDI benefits payable based on eligibility for January 2024 and thereafter.

Under current law, any portion of the AIME that is below the first PIA bend point is multiplied by a factor of 0.90 in computing the PIA. The first bend point is changed (indexed) each year for those becoming newly eligible in the year by the increase or decrease in the AWI from the third year to the second year prior to their initial year of eligibility. This provision would increase the level of the first PIA bend point from the level that would apply under current law by 22 percent for all OASDI benefits payable based on eligibility for January 2024 and thereafter, regardless of when any beneficiary became initially eligible. This provision would also increase the first PIA factor by 5 percentage points, for a PIA factor of 95 for 2024 and later.

