

## Local Woman Fights Denial of Disability Claim

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KDKA

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Officials say two thirds of valid disability claims were denied, which left millions of Americans, including one local woman, to fend for themselves.

As for the local woman, when the Social Security Administration denied her claim, she said she called her Congressman.

Jean Sbaraglia, of Allison Park, says her problems started in 2005 when she became acutely ill and was in and out the hospital more than a dozen times.

The single mom of three adopted children says she lost her job and became unable to support her family.

"I was told that unless I was incurably ill and that I could lick a stamp or dial the phone, even if I was blind, that I was able to be employee," says Sbaraglia.

"People who don't have an income or are raising children and doing all the right things shouldn't have to come to their Congressional representative to get the help that she should have gotten in the first place," says U.S. Representative Jason Altmire.

Congressman Altmire says he was able to get a judge to hear her case, and eventually Sbaraglia was able to get her benefits.

However, a two-month CBS News investigation found that two-thirds of all federal disability applicants were denied last year alone, which is nearly a million people.

"It's the policy of the Social Security Administration to deny first hoping that the person will go away and lose interest and not file an appeal," said Altmire.

Almost three dozen former examiners in 14 states told CBS News they were encouraged to deny claims to keep costs down.

By telling her story, Sbaraglia and Congressman Altmire say they hope to raise awareness and help other people from our area get the benefits they need.

"I am here today hoping that someone may hear our cry and help someone else in this," Sbaraglia adds.

In their investigation, CBS News reports also finding a huge backlog of cases that includes 750,000 people waiting for their applications to be examined.

Officials say that's up 150 percent since 2000.