



**OPENING STATEMENT CHAIRMAN SAM JOHNSON (R-TX)
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY
THE BENEFITS OF THOSE WHO CANNOT PROTECT THEMSELVES THROUGH THE
REPRESENTATIVE PAYEE PROGRAM
JUNE 5, 2013**

(REMARKS AS PREPARED)

Good morning. Today the Subcommittee will examine how Social Security protects the benefits of those who cannot protect themselves.

About 14 percent of those receiving Social Security or Supplemental Security Income benefits need someone to manage their payments. These are our most vulnerable, including children and those who are mentally or physically incapable of managing their benefits.

Most often their payees, known as representative payees, are family members; often a parent or a spouse. However, they can also be a friend or a qualified organization, such as a social service agency or a nursing home.

Sadly, there are payees who take advantage, sometimes in horrific ways, of the very people they are supposed to protect.

In January of this year, the Justice Department announced that Linda Weston, her daughter and three co-defendants were charged in a 193-count indictment with crimes including murder in the aid of racketeering, hate crimes, and sex trafficking.

According to the indictment, Weston persuaded each victim to make her the payee for their Social Security payments in exchange for the promise of a place to live. Weston, aided by the co-defendants, subjected the victims to inhumane living conditions, including beating the victims, holding them captive in locked closets, basements and attics, and moving the victims between States to avoid detection.

The indictment alleges that use of these techniques caused two of the victims to die, while the others were abused for years until October 15, 2011, when the Philadelphia police rescued them from the sub-basement of an apartment building.

The perpetrators of these crimes are in jail, awaiting trial.

As a former Prisoner of War, I know enduring torture can quickly mangle your body and slowly destroy your soul. I lived through what could only be called hell on earth for nearly seven years. Your health and safety is of no interest to your captors.

It breaks my heart to know the terrors these innocent folks endured here at home. While this level of cruelty, from what we know is rare, it is inexcusable and intolerable.

Soon after these crimes became public, members of this Committee asked the Government Accountability Office to examine Social Security's representative payee program. GAO is releasing this very important report today and Mr. Bertoni is here to tell us about their findings.

Today there are almost 6 million representative payees who manage \$72 billion in benefits each year for 8.4 million beneficiaries.

Over the past ten years, the number of people needing a representative payee has grown by 20 percent and will only continue to grow as people live longer.

According to the Alzheimer's association, by 2025 the number of people affected by Alzheimer's disease will increase by 40 percent, reaching over 7 million.

Congress last looked at the challenges facing the representative payee program when it passed the Social Security Protection Act of 2004 and strengthened the protections against misuse.

The Weston case illustrates the importance of finding the right payee in the first place and the importance of effective oversight.

Clearly Social Security must do better. The agency must rise to the challenge of doing what's right to protect the benefits of those who cannot protect themselves, today, and in the future.

I thank our witnesses for being here today and I look forward to hearing their testimony.