

Hearing on the Social Security Death Records

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It has come to my attention that there will be a hearing on the Social Security Death Records to determine, among other things, if access to them should change. I understand that this change is being considered because of identity theft. Even though I support Congress's intent to protect Americans from improper usage of their personal information, and to protect them from identity theft, I feel that limiting or stopping access to the SSDI would be wrong and ill advised.

Limiting or stopping access to the SSDI would have an adverse effect on the income of those that depend on these records to do their jobs. The SSDI is used by credit reporting agencies, merchants, private investigators looking for missing heirs in probates, media reporters, university researchers, genealogists and others. In a struggling economy, Congress should not consider actions that would negatively impact workers, when the action does not accomplish the intended good.

Limiting or stopping access to the SSDI would actually increase identity theft because it verifies a person's death. Persons wishing to commit theft would still steal identities of individuals who have passed away by reading the obituaries in local newspapers (which are online for most), and then conduct business in another state. Without the SSDI, a national database to check, it is extremely unlikely other states would be aware of the death. In the end it will not stop theft, but in all likelihood increase it.

Limiting or stopping access to the SSDI would make it more difficult or impossible for families to access important family information. There are mental and physical health issues that are hereditary. Although the SSDI does not have this information, it helps researchers locate death information that can lead to family medical histories.

Limiting or stopping access to the SSDI would adversely affect the millions of genealogy researchers, and the good produced by it. Genealogy is more than a fun or benign hobby. Genealogists gain an education as they pursue their family history. They gain knowledge about history, culture, languages, paleography, geography, law, institutions, government. They gain greater understanding not just of their families, but politics, institutions, and communities, and the impact of decisions made by individuals and governments. This makes them more informed voters and citizens.

In addition, genealogy addresses many of the problems in our society due to the disintegration of families and communities, high mobility, economic downturns, isolation, and a host of other challenges. People learn from the experiences of others in history. It takes on added meaning because it is their family.

Finally genealogy research, which relies on records like the SSDI, helps people to understand more about themselves. People are in a large measure a product of their family and environment. **Withholding**

information, like that in the SSDI, from people, is in effect robbing them of their identity. So you could say that you will be helping to perpetrate another form of identity theft.

I say this from personal experience, having pursued family history for over twenty years, and more recently having completed a degree in family history and genealogy. I understand how seemingly small decisions by the government can lead to big outcomes for individuals.

I hope that in your upcoming hearing you will not limit or stop access to the SSDI because I believe that what you hope to gain will only lead to more identify theft, by those committing the crime, and on individuals who are searching for their identity. This is in addition to an adverse impact on income for those who use the records in their jobs.

Sincerely,

Patricia Stinson