

Committee on Ways and Means

Social Security Protection Act of 2003 – H.R. 743

Social Security is one of our nation's most important programs, providing essential income security when a breadwinner retires, becomes disabled, or dies. Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits constitute our government's largest expense—consuming approximately ¼ of our Federal budget and growing. By the time children born this year finish high school, Social Security's costs will triple.

Nearly 80 percent of Americans pay more of their taxes to support Social Security than all government programs combined. Workers and beneficiaries have paid for and deserve enhanced Social Security protections to ensure precious program dollars are not lost through waste, fraud, and abuse.

The Social Security Protection Act

Protects beneficiaries from “representative payees” who misuse benefits.

- Enables the Social Security Administration (SSA) to withhold tax refunds, use contract collection agencies, and utilize other tools to collect misused benefits from representative payees.
- Raises standards and improves monitoring for those serving as representative payees.
- Imposes civil monetary penalties on those who mismanage benefits.

Denies Social Security benefits to fugitive felons and probation/parole violators.

Deters program waste, fraud, and abuse.

- Creates new civil monetary penalties for Social Security fraud.
- Increases overpayment collection by authorizing recovery across Social Security and SSI program lines.
- Prevents persons from misrepresenting themselves when providing Social Security-related services.
- Protects Social Security employees from harm while conducting their duties.

Helps individuals with disabilities gain access to representation and encourages disabled beneficiaries' return to work.

- Extends direct fee payment to attorneys for individuals seeking SSI benefits, coinciding with a 5-year demonstration project that allows non-attorneys to qualify for direct fee payment for the first time.
- Enables the SSA to better examine alternative methods of encouraging work.
- Expands eligibility for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit.
- Enables individuals receiving disability benefits based on a parent's earnings due to a childhood disability to work without fear of losing the ability to restart those benefits if they must later stop working.

Closes a loophole that enables some teachers in Texas and Georgia to contribute just a few dollars to Social Security to receive nearly \$100,000 in additional lifetime spousal benefits.

Improves and simplifies the SSI program, especially for members of the military and their families.

Has bipartisan support, the support of key stakeholders, and saves money.

- Supported by AARP, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the Social Security Administration's Inspector General, Citizens Against Government Waste, the National Conference of State Social Security Administrators, the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, the Association of Administrative Law Judges, and the National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives, and the National Council of Social Security Management Associations.
- Saves the unified budget about \$340 million over five years and \$800 million over 10 years according to CBO.
- On February 11, 2004, the House agreed to the Senate amendments and passed H.R. 743 by a vote of 402 to 19. On March 2, 2004, the President signed the bill into law.