

Comment on Hearing on Social Security's Death Records

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Title of Hearing: Social Security's Death Records

I am writing to state the importance of the identifying information included within the Social Security Administration Death Index (SSDI). I use the SSDI every day in my forensic genealogical practice.

To gain an appreciation of the value of the SSDI for the accomplishment of my work, I would like to offer a brief explanation of my business. I have worked full time for 22 years exclusively conducting forensic genealogical investigations for attorneys and trust officers. While I work on a variety of types of legal cases; all involve identifying, locating and documenting people for the purpose of distribution of assets.

My expert testimony, written and/or oral, is required for the purpose of identifying individuals defined by appropriate statutes. In the case of an administration of an estate, the individual state statutes define in genealogical terms the heirs-at-law who are eligible for inheritance. By collecting documentation about the family members and analysis of the data, we are able to offer the court-quality evidence to support the heirs. Each person in the family must be identified using as many primary documents as possible. The SSDI is critical to the performance of this research. Often we are working with no clues from the family about the fate of other family members many of whom may be deceased. In each case the available identifying data for individuals varies but commonly we have almost nothing. Each of the components of the SSDI are useful in identifying family members.

Other types of cases on which we are asked to provide expert testimony are probate of wills, clearing titles to real estate, guardianships, ownership of intellectual property, and distribution of assets from trusts.