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Title of hearing: Hearing on Social Security's Death Records

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my perspective on the accuracy and uses of the Social Security Administration's Death Master File.

If my understanding is correct, the information in the Death Master File is used by government agencies, financial institutions, medical and genealogical researchers, and workers' benefit plans to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse. As a genealogist, I use the Death Master File to help clients find correct information about their deceased ancestors. This often leads to filing a request for the SS-5 (application) form, which might provide genealogical information not available elsewhere. Many of my clients have personal reasons for learning about their ancestry. Some have legal and medical reasons for doing so. The closing of the Death Master file impacts my legitimate research.

According to the information posted on your website (<http://waysandmeans.house.gov/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=276834>), of the 2,500,00 deaths reported each year, 14,000 individuals are incorrectly listed on the Death Master File. Although it is regrettable that even one death is reported incorrectly, this is a "fail" rate of about .5%. Only a portion of that .5% results in personal and financial hardship for those who are erroneously listed as deceased and a smaller portion results in identity theft. All systems will have inefficiencies, but I believe that the benefits of making the Death Master File public outweigh the risks and that other means can be found for dealing with misinformation rather than closing the Death Master File.

Thank you to the Subcommittee on Social Security for allowing me the opportunity to make this statement. I am making this statement on behalf of my own interest and not as a representative of clients or any other group.

Sincerely,  
Charlene M. Pipkin, Accredited Genealogist®

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