

Investigating Social Security Fraud

Social Security's overall fraud rate is very low – about 8,300 fraud allegations merited investigation in 2014, and 1,300 people were convicted of Social Security fraud. But fraud does happen, and when it does, it's important to throw the book at the perpetrators.

Social Security fraud comes in a number of forms.

- Social Security benefit theft
 - Stealing checks out of mailboxes or diverting electronic deposits
 - Cashing Social Security checks after the person who earned them has died
- Eligibility fraud
 - Faking an illness or disability
 - Lying about family relationships to receive benefits
 - Lying about current or past work in order to qualify for benefits
- Abuse of a position of trust
 - Misuse of funds by a “representative payee” trusted to administer benefits for a child or mentally incapable adult (often combined with other abuse)
 - Providing false evidence for a benefit application or accepting bribes in exchange for certifying unearned benefits
- Identity theft and other types of Social Security number misuse

The Social Security Inspector General's Office of Investigations – Social Security's “cops on the beat” – investigates Social Security fraud, assesses civil penalties, and works with the Department of Justice to secure criminal convictions. However, Congress cut the IG's budget in three of the past five years. As a result, we lost experienced investigators and have fewer fraud investigators now than we did five years ago.

Fraud Investigation Results (2014)

Allegations received: 121,461

Fraud investigations opened: 8,335

Criminal convictions: 1,291

Civil penalties assessed: 412

Inspector General Budget as a Share of Social Security Benefits Paid

