



# News Release

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October 2, 2020

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## **Social Security Employees in Illinois Sentenced in Federal Court on Charges Including Bribery and Identity Theft**

*Investigations Revealed Employees Misused Agency Systems for Personal Gain*

The Inspector General of Social Security, Gail S. Ennis, is announcing the sentencings this week of two Social Security Administration (SSA) employees in the Northern District of Illinois. Anne Aroste, also known as Ann Aroste, and Kurt Walter were sentenced after being convicted of charges related to their misuse of SSA systems for personal gain. These charges were based on two separate Social Security Office of the Inspector General (OIG) criminal investigations.

In the first case, Aroste, who worked as a claims specialist in SSA's Aurora, Illinois office, submitted and approved fraudulent applications for SSA benefits of individuals whose identities she altered with fictitious information, including U.S. Passport information, to ensure the individuals would qualify for the benefits. She then directed the funds to bank accounts she controlled. Between August 2013 and May 2018, Aroste received over \$730,000 from this scheme. She was indicted by a Federal grand jury in June 2018 and later pleaded guilty to one count of aggravated identity theft and one count of wire fraud. Aroste was sentenced today to 48 months' imprisonment and 3 years' supervised release, as well as restitution of \$732,382 to SSA.

In a separate case earlier this week, Kurt Walter was sentenced in the Northern District of Illinois for accepting a bribe in the course of his official duties as an SSA employee. Walter, who worked as a service representative in the Elgin, Illinois SSA office, received a total of \$8,400 to access SSA databases and provide individuals' earnings information to another defendant in the case, Joshua Hughes, without the individuals' authorization. Hughes, who operated a process server company and a company providing consumer installment loans, then used the earnings information in wage garnishment actions against those individuals.

On Wednesday, September 30, Walter was sentenced for his role in the bribery scheme, receiving 2 years of probation. He resigned from SSA in February 2019, and had been charged via information in July 2019 with one count of bribery. Joshua Hughes previously pleaded guilty to bribery of a public official, and was sentenced to four months' imprisonment.

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“SSA possesses the most sensitive and personal information for almost every person in this country, and SSA employees have a fundamental duty to protect that information,” said Inspector General Ennis. “We take any violation of the public trust very seriously, and we will continue to work with SSA to identify and root out suspected employee fraud. I want to thank the U.S. Attorney’s Office for its support of these investigations and its efforts to bring them to a successful resolution.”

SSA officials identified and referred both matters to the OIG based on integrity reviews that alerted management to suspicious systems activity. The cases were investigated under the supervision of Acting Special Agent-in-Charge Hector Ortega, Social Security OIG, Chicago Field Division. The Anne Aroste matter was investigated jointly with the Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service (DSS), and prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jared Jodrey. Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Nirinjan Emani prosecuted the Walter matter. Inspector General Ennis thanked Mr. Jodrey and Mr. Emani for their efforts and DSS for its partnership throughout the Aroste investigation.

Members of the public are encouraged to report suspected Social Security fraud to the OIG at <https://oig.ssa.gov/>.