



News Release

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Oregon Man Sentenced for Theft of Government Funds

Defendant failed to report father's death; collected and misused more than \$220,000 in retirement benefits after his father's death

The Inspector General for the Social Security Administration (SSA), Gail S. Ennis, is announcing the sentencing yesterday of Steven Clayton Stark, in Portland, Oregon, for theft of government funds. Mr. Stark was sentenced to five years of probation, and ordered to pay \$221,960 in restitution to SSA. Mr. Stark pleaded guilty to these charges in November 2020.

According to the plea agreement, Mr. Stark's father was receiving Social Security retirement benefits when he passed away on May 12, 2009. The benefits were deposited into a bank account held jointly with Mr. Stark, who failed to inform the bank or SSA of his father's death. Instead, the money continued to be deposited into the joint account, and was transferred into other accounts owned by Mr. Stark, and spent. He continued transferring and using these funds for nearly a decade.

We initiated this criminal investigation after an [SSA Office of the Inspector General audit](#) in 2017 identified Mr. Stark's father—and others—as potentially deceased based on U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs records. When OIG investigators interviewed Mr. Stark, he admitted misusing the retirement benefits intended for his father. The total loss to SSA was calculated at \$221,960.

"This sentence is a warning that misusing Social Security benefits after someone dies is a Federal crime," said Steuart Markley, Special Agent-in-Charge of the SSA OIG's Seattle Field Division. "We will continue to work with SSA to identify these cases and hold accountable those who believe themselves to be above the law."

Inspector General Ennis thanked the U.S. Attorney's Office, and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Rachel K. Sowray, in particular, for their efforts leading to today's sentencing.

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

Members of the press may make inquiries to Social Security OIG at oig.dcom@ssa.gov or (410) 965-2671.