

Instructions:

1. Since all mail sent to Congress is held for up to 10 days for processing (due to terrorism threats), please fax your letter to Congressman Johnson at (202) 225-1485.
2. Also, please create copies of your letter to send to your own Congressperson and Senators via fax or e-mail.
3. To determine your US House of Representative click <http://www.house.gov/representatives/> and enter your zip code in the upper left corner of the screen.
4. To determine your US Senators click http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm
5. Keep in mind that many Congresspersons and Senators will only accept emails from their constituents!
6. Finally, please delete any bracketed [] language left in the letter as well as these instructions before you save and send your letter.

[Your address]

[Date]

Honorable Sam Johnson, Chairman
Subcommittee on Social Security
Ways and Means Committee
1211 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: **Keep Public Access to the Death Master File**

Dear Chairman Johnson:

I am disappointed and outraged that not one leader from the genealogical community was invited to testify at the Hearing of the Subcommittee on Social Security of the Ways and Means Committee on 2 February 2012. Genealogists have the most to lose if the Death Master File is closed to the public.

The Social Security Death Index (SSDI), the commercial version of the Death Master File, has been an essential tool for genealogists seeking relatives born in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Many genealogists begin their family history research focusing on members of their family previously unknown to them. The estrangement may have occurred because of death, divorce, abandonment, or other reasons. Regardless of the cause, learning about an unknown branch of the family can assist with the healing process.

Since many vital records are maintained on the state-level, absent the SSDI, no national index would be available to determine where people may have moved. The SSDI is also valuable in determining the date of death and location of an individual for whom you can then locate an obituary containing information not found in other records. Another use of the SSDI: identifying siblings and cousins who may share important medical history information. These include genetically inherited attributes for which these people have the trait to pass on but no actual disease manifestation themselves. Finding and notifying distant cousins in such instances can mean the difference between early detection or treatment versus debilitation and death.

[Insert any relevant personal experiences]

Genealogists are strongly opposed to identity theft and support efforts to stop it immediately, using tools already available to government agencies. For example:

- If income tax returns were electronically compared to the Master Death File, specific cases should be flagged for special processing, thus thwarting the person attempting to create a tax fraud before the fraud occurs.
- The SSNs of parents should be required when filing a tax return for any minor. If the minor dies, the IRS would have a procedure to flag any filings without the parents' social security numbers, again preventing attempts at fraud.
- The National Taxpayer Advocate's report for 2011 specifically highlights the benefits of the IRS Issued Identity Protection PINs and suggests that taxpayers should be allowed to turn off their ability to file tax returns electronically. Any family which suffers a death could elect to turn off the electronic filing ability.

Put simply: tax fraud can be prevented without passing a law that would end public access to the Death Master File.

Sincerely,

[Your name]