

Social Security Column

HOW WE PROTECT YOU FROM MISLEADING ADVERTISING AND COMMUNICATIONS

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Social Security works with the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to protect you from scams that use Social Security as bait. **Section 1140 of the *Social Security Act*** allows OIG to impose severe penalties against anyone who engages in misleading Social Security-related advertising or imposter communications.

For example, the OIG may impose a penalty against anyone who:

- Mails misleading solicitations that appear to be from or authorized by Social Security.
- Operates an imposter website or social media account designed to look like it belongs to or is authorized by Social Security.
- Sends emails or text messages or makes telephone calls claiming to be from Social Security.

- Sells Social Security’s free forms, applications, and publications without our written approval.
- Charges a fee for a service that Social Security provides free of charge without providing a clearly visible notice that Social Security provides the service for free.

If you receive a suspicious Social Security-related advertisement or imposter communication, please let us know immediately. We encourage you to report potential scams to the OIG at oig.ssa.gov. You can also send an email to OIG.1140@ssa.gov.

Please try to capture as much information about the communication as you can. Here’s what you can do:

- For suspicious websites or social media accounts, take a screenshot of the webpage. Note the website address or social media link – and how you came across it.
- For emails and text messages, capture the entire message and any message links.
- For U.S. mail, retain the complete communication, including the outside envelope and all inserts.
- For telephone calls, note the caller identification phone number and any company name or callback number that the caller or recorded message provides.

This information will help OIG locate the source of the suspicious communication. You can review Section 1140 at www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title11/1140.htm. You can also check out our publication, *What You Need to Know About Misleading Advertising*, at www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10005.pdf.

Please share this information with friends and family and help us spread the word on social media!

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