



“Stopping Improper Payments to Deceased People Act”

February 5, 2018

Dear Member of Congress:

The “Stopping Improper Payments to Deceased People Act” is important legislation that would curb waste and fraud involving federal payments. The Project On Government Oversight urges support for this bipartisan bill.

A major portion of wasteful government spending is a broad category known as “improper payments,” which are payments made in the wrong amount, to the wrong people, or for the wrong reason. Each year, federal improper payments result from insufficient financial accountability, and divert dollars from where they are needed.

One significant cause of improper payments is payments made by federal agencies to individuals who are deceased. According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), not all federal agencies have access to the complete list of deceased individuals maintained by the Social Security Administration (SSA).¹ Instead, when checking eligibility for federal payments, many agencies can only use a partial list and so mistakenly pay millions of deceased people. For example, the Department of Agriculture and the Federal Emergency Management Agency can only use the partial list, resulting in improper payments to dead program beneficiaries.

Stopping Improper Payments to Deceased People Act follows the GAO’s recommendation to provide agencies with access to the full death list maintained by the SSA. The Act would:

- Grant the SSA authorization to share its complete death data with all relevant federal agencies. Appropriate privacy and security of the data sharing would continue.
- Require steps for improvements to the SSA database of deceased individuals to ensure accuracy and completeness.
- Provide for reviews of agency use of the death data by both the Office of Management and Budget and the GAO.

¹ Daniel Bertoni and Beryl H. Davis, Government Accountability Office, *Improper Payments: Government-Wide Estimates and Use of Death Data to Help Prevent Payments to Deceased Individuals* (GAO-15-482T), March 16, 2015. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-482T> (Downloaded February 1, 2018)

Founded in 1981, the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) is a nonpartisan independent watchdog that champions good government reforms. POGO's investigations into wasteful and abusive uses of federal dollars, misconduct, and conflicts of interest achieve a more effective, accountable, open, and ethical federal government. In that light, POGO supports the bill and its goal of improving program integrity and financial accountability, and we urge Members of Congress to do the same. If you have any questions, please contact Peter Tyler of the Project On Government Oversight (ptyler@pogo.org or 202-347-1122).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danielle Brian". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Danielle Brian
Executive Director