

# Your Social Security

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News and Information for SSDI and SSI Recipients

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## Do You Have To Give Out Your Social Security Number?

With identity thefts reaching alarming proportions here are some important steps you can take to protect yourself.

If you're like most sensible people, you're probably pretty careful with the keys to your home. You wouldn't send them to someone you didn't know but who had asked for them in an email. If your doctor or dentist asked for your keys, you'd challenge them about why they wanted them. Yet, every day hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of Americans give up the most critical key to their identity, their Social Security numbers without so much as a whimper. Unknowingly they give up their SSNs to identity thieves on the Internet. If a

health care provider asks for a SSN on a form they dutifully write it down. And in hundreds of other situations they supply this all important number without much thought.

When Social Security began in 1936, Social Security numbers were only intended as an identification for obtaining retirement benefits. No one at that time imagined the far-reaching applications for those nine digit identifying numbers and certainly no one in the 1930s could have foreseen the epidemic of identity thievery that Social Security numbers would trigger in today's world.

It is clear that to prevent some thief from emptying your bank account, from running up a huge debt on bogus credit cards taken out in your name, from intercepting your Social Security benefits check or from perpetrating any one of thousands of other criminal acts against you, you have to protect your Social Security number like you protect the keys to your home. But do you have to provide your Social Security number when asked for it? The answer depends on who's asking.

There are certain government agencies to whom you are legally obligated to provide your SSN. The Internal Revenue Service is at the top of this list and is followed by welfare offices and state



Protect your Social Security number like you protect the keys to your home.

departments of motor vehicles. They all can require you to provide your Social Security number as mandated by federal law.

For private businesses, generally you can refuse to fork over your Social Security number when asked. However, many businesses may attempt to strong arm you by refusing to do business with you. Health care providers often demand Social Security numbers claiming that they are required for insurance purposes. In these instances, ask to speak with a manager and negotiate. Perhaps they may be willing to take an alternate form of identification like a driver's license number or some will settle for just the last four digits of your SSN.

Finally, be especially cautious about disclosing your SSN via the Internet and never respond to emails that appear to come from the IRS, Amazon, PayPal, etc. that ask for your Social Security number. They are scams. These organizations would never ask for your SSN in an email.

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## Do You Have To Give Out Your Social Security Number?



## 5 Things You Should Know About Social Security:

### 1. How are Social Security Disability benefits calculated?

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits are based on your average lifetime earnings before your disability began. The severity of your disability or what your income is does not have an impact on benefit amounts. However, your benefits may be reduced if you are receiving disability payments from other sources.



### 2. Do you have to pay taxes on Social Security benefits (including disability benefits)?

Social Security benefits lost their tax-free status in 1984. You will have to pay federal taxes on your Social Security benefits if you file a federal tax return as an individual and your total income is more than \$25,000. If you file a joint return, you will have to pay taxes if you and your spouse have a



**"5 Deadly Mistakes That Can Destroy Your Social Security Disability Case" is the #1 guide to improving the odds of winning a disability case.**

**For a FREE copy for you or someone you care about call Cuddigan Law at 402.933.5400 or email us at [lawteam@cuddiganlaw.com](mailto:lawteam@cuddiganlaw.com)**

total income of more than \$32,000.

### 3. How does Social Security keep up with inflation?

Every year the government adjusts the benefit for inflation. Known as a cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, this inflation protection can help you keep up with rising living expenses if Social Security benefits are part of your finances. For 2013 the COLA was 1.7%. COLA for 2014 will be announced in October.

### 4. How does the Social Security Administration know when a beneficiary dies?

The SSA learns of deaths from reports by family members, other government agencies and funeral homes. You should inform the SSA as soon as possible when a family member dies.

### 5. Can same sex partners collect benefits based on a partner's work record?

The Social Security Administration announced in August that it will begin offering partner benefits to same-sex couples, but there are restrictions (most notably, for now only married same sex couples who live in a state that recognizes their marriages will be eligible). SSA says additional "policy instructions" will be forthcoming in the next few months.



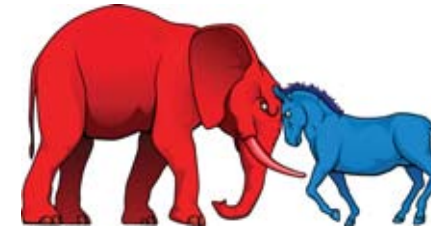
## Cuddigan Law Opens Lincoln Office.

Cuddigan Law is pleased to announce the opening of its new office location in Lincoln, Nebraska located at 3800 Normal Boulevard.

"We are very excited to be a part of the Lincoln community," said Sean Cuddigan, Vice-President of Cuddigan Law. "Now it is easier and more convenient than ever for Nebraskans to access top-notch legal advice to assist in their Social Security disability claims because Social Security disability law is all we do."

Cuddigan Law's footprint now covers a wide area. With offices in both Omaha and Lincoln, everyone living in the eastern part of the state is only a short drive away from a Cuddigan Law office. If you are considering a Social Security disability claim, Cuddigan Law offers a free evaluation of your case. Call us at (402) 933-5400 or email us at [lawteam@cuddiganlaw.com](mailto:lawteam@cuddiganlaw.com).

## Congress Battles Over Social Security



Concerns loom large about budget cuts and a new Social Security Commissioner.

By all signs, the Social Security Administration is facing a tough road ahead. Social Security payments are exempt from the across-the-board budget cuts but the agency's operating costs are not protected. A new federal budget will be in place when the 2014 fiscal year starts in October and the agency is bracing for more cuts in its administrative budget. The SSA weathered this year's cutbacks without furloughing staff members despite the federal budget sequestration. However, they did have to cut hours at their field offices which has made it more difficult for beneficiaries to file paperwork or get answers.

Another result of the budget trimming: the backlog of disability cases has gotten worse. The SSA has struggled for years to handle all SSDI and SSI cases. The backlog has now ballooned to an estimated 835,000 cases. With the budget ax likely to fall again this year, most Social Security observers expect this number to grow.

At a time when the SSA is dealing with shrinking budgets and having to make some hard choices, the agency doesn't have a permanent leader. More than six months ago, Social Security Commissioner Michael Astrue ended his six year term and left his post. President Obama named Carolyn Colvin as the acting commissioner. Colvin has a solid resume and prior to this promotion she was a deputy commissioner at the agency. However as an acting commissioner, her power is limited and she seems reluctant to make changes that may be overturned if she is not given the job on a permanent basis. With bruising fights over other nominations in the increasingly partisan Senate chambers, the Obama administration has been hesitant to nominate a new leader for the SSA. The administration is not commenting on when they will announce a nominee.

These are only the immediate concerns. Also brewing are longer term worries, especially about the dwindling Social Security trust fund. Last year \$774 billion was paid out of the fund. Unless changes are made, the fund will be exhausted by 2033 which means payroll taxes would fund Social Security at only 75 percent of current payments. "At some point we're going to be having a discussion about the big picture," says Max Richtman, president of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare.

## We're in your corner.

We value the confidence and trust you have placed with us in the past.

If you or a family member or a friend could use our help now or in the future, please pass along our name.

Cuddigan Law.

Disability law is all we do.



Tim & Sean Cuddigan

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