

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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<https://oig.ssa.gov>

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Owner of Misleading SSA Office-Locator Website Agrees to \$35,000 Penalty

A Michigan-based internet entrepreneur agreed to pay a \$35,000 civil monetary penalty to settle the Government's claim that the website "LocalSocialSecurityOffice.org" falsely conveyed the impression that the site was an official SSA site or was otherwise approved, endorsed, or authorized by SSA, in violation of Section 1140 of the *Social Security Act*.

Section 1140, a consumer protection law, establishes two broad prohibited activities:

- Prohibits people and companies from misleading consumers through various communications by giving a false impression of association with or endorsement by SSA. Prohibited communications can take many forms, including mailed, emailed, and televised advertisements, websites, social media, personally targeted advertisements, mobile apps, and text messages; and
- Prohibits reproducing and selling Social Security publications and forms without authorization, as well as charging for services, that SSA provides free, without providing proper notices.

The website "LocalSocialSecurityOffice.org" included Social Security related words and images commonly associated with SSA, including the agency's official logo and a Social Security card. The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) reviewed the site and determined the site's design and presentation had the potential to lead site visitors to believe they were interacting with an official SSA website. The site's owner cooperated with the OIG inquiry and immediately took the site offline. Without admitting to violating the law, the site's owner agreed to comply with Section 1140 and permanently abandon the site, in addition to paying a penalty.

The OIG can impose civil monetary penalties, using authority delegated from the Commissioner of Social Security, against individuals, organizations, or other entities that violate Section 1140. All monies collected go directly to SSA's Old Age and Survivors Trust Fund.

Citizens can report suspected Section 1140 violations to the Social Security Fraud Hotline:

- online at <https://oig.ssa.gov/report>;
- by mail to P.O. Box 17785, Baltimore, MD, 21235;
- by fax at (410) 597-0118; or
- by phone at (800) 269-0271 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.

For more information on Section 1140, please visit <https://oig.ssa.gov/section-1140>, or contact Andrew Cannarsa, OIG Communications Director, at 410-965-2671.