Belleville Man Pleads Guilty To Stealing Government Benefits From Deceased In-Law

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EAST ST. LOUIS – A Belleville man admitted to stealing more than $17,000 in Government benefits from a deceased in-law in a U.S. District Court on Tuesday. Scott C. Gunnarson, 47, pled guilty to one count of Theft of Government Funds.

"By failing to notify the Government of a loved one's passing and continuing to collect their benefits, individuals commit felony theft," said U.S. Attorney Rachelle Aud Crowe.

"Defrauding benefit agencies is a serious offense, and relatives tempted to swindle funds face going to federal prison." "This plea demonstrates that stealing Social Security benefits designated for another individual is a federal crime," said Gail S. Ennis, Inspector General for the Social Security Administration. "I want to thank OPM for working with us to investigate this crime and the U.S. Attorney's Office for prosecuting this case." "OPM OIG is committed to protecting federal funds from fraud," said Conrad J. Quarles, Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Investigations, OPM OIG. "I applaud the hard work of our investigators and our partners in recovering these misspent funds."

According to court documents, Gunnarson's in-law received monthly payments via direct deposit from the Social Security Administration and the Office of Personnel Management's Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund as the beneficiary of her deceased spouse. The in-law passed away in April 2018, but neither the SSA nor the OPM was notified.

Gunnarson had access to the in-law's bank account since July 2019, when his wife passed away. Since then, more than $17,000 has been withdrawn from the in-law's bank account, as stated in bank records. The defendant's sentencing is scheduled for 10:30 a. m. on May 2, 2023. The SSA – Office of the Inspector General and the OPM – Office of the Inspector General contributed to the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Peter Reed is prosecuting the case.