



Office of the Inspector General
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Press Release

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Contact: Jonathan Lasher
Phone: (410) 965-2671

Missouri Company Agrees to Pay Civil Monetary Penalty to Settle Alleged Violation of Social Security Act

Hermeris, Inc., d/b/a SimpleFilings.com, of Kansas City, Missouri, has agreed to pay a civil monetary penalty of \$82,000 to settle the Social Security Administration (SSA) Office of the Inspector's (OIG) claim that the company violated Section 1140 of the *Social Security Act*, SSA Inspector General Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr. announced.

Section 1140 prohibits the use of SSA words and letters in advertisements or solicitations in a manner that conveys the false impression that SSA approved, endorsed, or authorized the subject of the advertisements or solicitations; or that the subject has some official connection with SSA.

SimpleFilings used the domain names www.gov-tax.net/ssn-card and www.simplefilings.gov-tax.net/ssn-card to direct users to its SimpleFilings website, a self-described "Social Security card application preparation service." The OIG asserts that these domain names conveyed the false impression that SimpleFilings had some connection with SSA in violation of the *Act*. The OIG received complaints of consumer confusion caused by the use of these domain names.

Without admitting that it violated Section 1140, SimpleFilings agreed to pay an \$82,000 civil monetary penalty; discontinue the use of the domain names gov-tax.net/ssn-card and simplefilings.gov-tax.net/ssn-card; and make changes to its website to clarify its services. Penalties collected for violations of Section 1140 are deposited into SSA's Old Age and Survivors Trust Fund.

Inspector General O'Carroll reminds all citizens that the Social Security Administration provides Form SS-5, *Application for a Social Security Card*, free of charge through its official website at www.socialsecurity.gov, local Social Security offices, and other authorized locations nationwide.

"We are committed to fighting misleading Social Security-related Internet fraud—whether it takes the form of a misleading website, search engine advertisement, or as it was in this case, a confusing domain name," said Inspector General O'Carroll.

For more information, contact Jonathan Lasher, Assistant Inspector General for External Relations, at (410) 965-2671.