



**Craig Olive**  
Register of Deeds - Johnston County  
Putting People First

May 19, 2017

The Honorable David Rouzer  
US Congressman District 7  
424 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Rouzer,

I hope you are doing well and enjoying this beautiful spring weather. The purpose of my letter is to make you aware of an issue that is a cause of concern for all North Carolina citizens.

As you may be aware, our Vital Records (birth, death and marriage) are considered public records here in North Carolina. This means that anyone and everyone can have access to these records. North Carolina death certificates list the decedent's social security number. This process makes it very easy for criminals to steal the identity of the deceased person. In fact, a local attorney here in Johnston County recently made me aware of a situation that one of his clients is facing. They have found out that someone in the Midwest US was using the social security number of their deceased family member. This is just one of many examples of this growing problem.

I decided to do a little research of my own. To my surprise, I found my deceased mother's social security number on one of many websites that tracks this information. I was shocked that at the click of a computer button, I found such sensitive information about my mother all over the internet. I am certain that if my mother's social security number is available so easily that many other citizens also have this situation.

The North Carolina General Statute that directs what information is on a death certificate is NC GS #130A-116. It says that the death certificate "shall" contain items prescribed and specified on the standard certificate of death, as prepared by the federal agency responsible for national vital statistics. The form US standard birth certificate as issued by the CDC includes as item 3, social security number. This form was last revised in 2003. This is why North Carolina requires the social security numbers on death certificates. The last study report completed by the

Division of Vital Statistics of the National Center for Health Statistics was completed in April 2000 with addenda in 2001. It recommended retaining the social security number to “aid in the identification of the decedent and facilitates the filing of social security claims”. This report was completed prior to the implementation of many of the Federal Trade Commission’s identify theft protection red flag rules that were instituted in 2007 (relating to financial institutions and creditors) and before “mining” and “ghosting” of personally identifying information became as prevalent as it is today. Of course, the balance is to determine how to prevent the filing of other types of fraudulent claims where identification of the decedent is necessary – insurance death benefits, social security claims, etc.

As the custodian of public records here in Johnston County, it is my responsibility to stand up for and help protect the citizens that I serve. I strongly feel that a change is needed on the federal level. I propose that only the last four digits of the social security number be listed on death certificates. This would enable the necessary information to be reported while still protecting the identity of the decedent. This change would not interfere with the decedent’s family getting benefits but would protect their loved one’s identity. In fact, normal procedures for funeral homes include notifying the Social Security Administration of a death; therefore, eliminating the need of the full social security number to be listed on the death certificate..

Again, as stated above, I propose that only the last four digits of the social security number be listed on death certificates. I look forward to working with you on this matter to help protect these vital records for our citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Craig Olive". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and address.

Craig Olive, Registrar  
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