

Untangling Social Security Benefits for Mistaken Fugitives

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After a heart attack rendered L.J. Crawford, 69, unable to work more than 15 years ago, he relied on monthly [Social Security](#) disability to get by. But in January 2006, the Union City, Tenn., man's payments stopped.

The reason: a 1988 warrant for unlawfully receiving unemployment benefits. But Crawford never received unemployment and didn't know about a warrant.

More than 200,000 Americans have been erroneously denied Social Security benefits because they were flagged through a program designed to prevent benefit payments to fugitives.

Now a [settlement in a class action suit](#) ensures that Social Security will restart payments and repay benefits totaling more than \$500 million due since January 2007. Further, the agency won't try to collect back payment for benefits paid before a warrant was discovered.

In the future, Social Security will suspend benefits only when warrants are issued for flight or escape, says Emilia Sicilia, an attorney with the [Urban Justice Center](#) in New York.

Michelle Diament is a frequent contributor to the AARP Bulletin and Bulletin Today.