

## Social Security Administration

## § 404.2040a

beneficiary is a member of an Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) assistance unit, we do not consider it inappropriate for a representative payee to make the benefit payments available to the AFDC assistance unit.

(b) *Institutional care.* If a beneficiary is receiving care in a Federal, State, or private institution because of mental or physical incapacity, current maintenance includes the customary charges made by the institution, as well as expenditures for those items which will aid in the beneficiary's recovery or release from the institution or expenses for personal needs which will improve the beneficiary's conditions while in the institution.

*Example:* An institutionalized beneficiary is entitled to a monthly Social Security benefit of \$320. The institution charges \$700 a month for room and board. The beneficiary's brother, who is the payee, learns the beneficiary needs new shoes and does not have any funds to purchase miscellaneous items at the institution's canteen.

The payee takes his brother to town and buys him a pair of shoes for \$29. He also takes the beneficiary to see a movie which costs \$3. When they return to the institution, the payee gives his brother \$3 to be used at the canteen.

Although the payee normally withholds only \$25 a month from Social Security benefit for the beneficiary's personal needs, this month the payee deducted the above expenditures and paid the institution \$10 less than he usually pays.

The above expenditures represent what we would consider to be proper expenditures for current maintenance.

(c) *Support of legal dependents.* If the current maintenance needs of the beneficiary are met, the payee may use part of the payments for the support of the beneficiary's legally dependent spouse, child, and/or parent.

*Example:* A disabled beneficiary receives a Veterans Administration (VA) benefit of \$325 and a Social Security benefit of \$525. The beneficiary resides in a VA hospital and his VA benefits are sufficient to provide for all of his needs; *i.e.*, cost of care and personal needs. The beneficiary's legal dependents—his wife and two children—have a total income of \$250 per month in Social Security benefits. However, they have expenses of approximately \$450 per month.

Because the VA benefits are sufficient to meet the beneficiary's needs, it would be ap-

propriate to use part of his Social Security benefits to support his dependents.

(d) *Claims of creditors.* A payee may not be required to use benefit payments to satisfy a debt of the beneficiary, if the debt arose prior to the first month for which payments are certified to a payee. If the debt arose prior to this time, a payee may satisfy it only if the current and reasonably foreseeable needs of the beneficiary are met.

*Example:* A retroactive Social Security check in the amount of \$1,640, representing benefits due for July 1980 through January 1981, was issued on behalf of the beneficiary to the beneficiary's aunt who is the representative payee. The check was certified in February 1981.

The nursing home, where the beneficiary resides, submitted a bill for \$1,139 to the payee for maintenance expenses the beneficiary incurred during the period from June 1980 through November 1980. (Maintenance charges for December 1980 through February 1981 had previously been paid.)

Because the benefits were not required for the beneficiary's current maintenance, the payee had previously saved over \$500 for the beneficiary and the beneficiary had no foreseeable needs which would require large disbursements, the expenditure for the maintenance charges would be consistent with our guidelines.

[47 FR 30472, July 14, 1982, as amended at 54 FR 35483, Aug. 28, 1989]

### § 404.2040a Compensation for qualified organizations serving as representative payees.

(a) *Organizations that can request compensation.* A qualified organization can request us to authorize it to collect a monthly fee from your benefit payment. A qualified organization is:

(1) Any State or local government agency with fiduciary responsibilities or whose mission is to carry out income maintenance, social service, or health care-related activities; or

(2) Any community-based nonprofit social service organization founded for religious, charitable or social welfare purposes, which is tax exempt under section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code and which is bonded/insured to cover misuse and embezzlement by officers and employees and which is licensed in each State in which it serves as representative payee (if licensing is available in the State). The minimum

amount of bonding or insurance coverage must equal the average monthly amount of social security payments received by the organization plus the amount of the beneficiaries' conserved funds (*i.e.*, beneficiaries' saved social security benefits) plus interest on hand. For example, an organization that has conserved funds of \$5,000 and receives an average of \$12,000 a month in social security payments must be bonded/insured for a minimum of \$17,000. The license must be appropriate under the laws of the State for the type of services the organization provides. An example of an appropriately licensed organization is a community mental health center holding a State license to provide community mental health services.

(b) *Requirements qualified organizations must meet.* Organizations that are qualified under paragraphs (a)(1) or (a)(2) of this section must also meet the following requirements before we can authorize them to collect a monthly fee.

(1) A qualified organization must regularly provide representative payee services concurrently to at least five beneficiaries. An organization which has received our authorization to collect a fee for representative payee services, but is temporarily (not more than 6 months) not a payee for at least five beneficiaries, may request our approval to continue to collect fees.

(2) A qualified organization must demonstrate that it is not a creditor of the beneficiary. See paragraph (c) of this section for exceptions to the requirement regarding creditors.

(c) *Creditor relationship.* On a case-by-case basis, we may authorize an organization to collect a fee for payee services despite the creditor relationship. (For example, the creditor is the beneficiary's landlord.) To provide this authorization, we will review all of the evidence submitted by the organization and authorize collection of a fee when:

(1) The creditor services (*e.g.*, providing housing) provided by the organization help to meet the current needs of the beneficiary; and

(2) The amount the organization charges the beneficiary for these services is commensurate with the beneficiary's ability to pay.

(d) *Authorization process.* (1) An organization must request in writing and receive an authorization from us *before* it may collect a fee.

(2) An organization seeking authorization to collect a fee must also give us evidence to show that it is qualified, pursuant to paragraphs (a), (b), and (c) of this section, to collect a fee.

(3) If the evidence provided to us by the organization shows that it meets the requirements of this section, and additional investigation by us proves it suitable to serve, we will notify the organization in writing that it is authorized to collect a fee. If we need more evidence, or if we are not able to authorize the collection of a fee, we will also notify the organization in writing that we have not authorized the collection of a fee.

(e) *Revocation and cancellation of the authorization.* (1) We will revoke an authorization to collect a fee if we have evidence which establishes that an organization no longer meets the requirements of this section. We will issue a written notice to the organization explaining the reason(s) for the revocation.

(2) An organization may cancel its authorization at any time upon written notice to us.

(f) *Notices.* The written notice we will send to an organization authorizing the collection of a fee will contain an effective date for the collection of a fee pursuant to paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) of this section. The effective date will be no earlier than the month in which the organization asked for authorization to collect a fee. The notice will be applicable to all beneficiaries for whom the organization was payee at the time of our authorization and all beneficiaries for whom the organization becomes payee while the authorization is in effect.

(g) *Limitation on fees.* (1) An organization authorized to collect a fee under this section may collect from a beneficiary a monthly fee for expenses (including overhead) it has incurred in providing payee services to a beneficiary. The limit on the fee a qualified organization may collect for providing payee services increases by the same percentage as the annual cost of living adjustment (COLA). The increased fee

## Social Security Administration

## § 404.2041

amount (rounded to the nearest dollar) is taken beginning with the benefit for December (received in January).

(2) Any agreement providing for a fee in excess of the amount permitted shall be void and treated as misuse of your benefits by the organization under § 404.2041.

(3) A fee may be collected for any month during which the organization—

(i) Provides representative payee services;

(ii) Receives a benefit payment for the beneficiary; and

(iii) Is authorized to receive a fee for representative payee services.

(4) Fees for services may not be taken from any funds conserved for the beneficiary by a payee in accordance with § 404.2045.

(5) Generally, an organization may not collect a fee for months in which it does not receive a benefit payment. However, an organization will be allowed to collect a fee for months in which it did not receive a payment if we later issue payment for these months and the organization:

(i) Received our approval to collect a fee for the months for which payment is made;

(ii) Provided payee services in the months for which payment is made; and

(iii) Was the payee when the retroactive payment was paid by us.

(6) Fees for services may not be taken from beneficiary benefits for the months for which we or a court of competent jurisdiction determine(s) that the representative payee misused benefits. Any fees collected for such months will be treated as a part of the beneficiary's misused benefits.

(7) An authorized organization can collect a fee for providing representative payee services from another source if the total amount of the fee collected from both the beneficiary and the other source does not exceed the amount authorized by us.

[69 FR 60234, Oct. 7, 2004, as amended at 71 FR 61407, Oct. 18, 2006]

### **§ 404.2041 Who is liable if your representative payee misuses your benefits?**

(a) A representative payee who misuses your benefits is responsible for

paying back misused benefits. We will make every reasonable effort to obtain restitution of misused benefits so that we can repay these benefits to you.

(b) Whether or not we have obtained restitution from the misuser, we will repay benefits in cases when we determine that a representative payee misused benefits and the representative payee is an organization or an individual payee serving 15 or more beneficiaries. When we make restitution, we will pay you or your alternative representative payee an amount equal to the misused benefits less any amount we collected from the misuser and repaid to you.

(c) Whether or not we have obtained restitution from the misuser, we will repay benefits in cases when we determine that an individual representative payee serving 14 or fewer beneficiaries misused benefits and our negligent failure in the investigation or monitoring of that representative payee results in the misuse. When we make restitution, we will pay you or your alternative representative payee an amount equal to the misused benefits less any amount we collected from the misuser and repaid to you.

(d) The term “negligent failure” used in this subpart means that we failed to investigate or monitor a representative payee or that we did investigate or monitor a representative payee but did not follow established procedures in our investigation or monitoring. Examples of our negligent failure include, but are not limited to, the following:

(1) We did not follow our established procedures in this subpart when investigating, appointing, or monitoring a representative payee;

(2) We did not timely investigate a reported allegation of misuse; or

(3) We did not take the necessary steps to prevent the issuance of payments to the representative payee after it was determined that the payee misused benefits.

(e) Our repayment of misused benefits under these provisions does not alter the representative payee's liability and responsibility as described in paragraph (a) of this section.

(f) Any amounts that the representative payee misuses and does not refund will be treated as an overpayment to