

May 16, 2011

Via U.S. Mail and Email (misha.kelly@ssa.gov)

The Honorable Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.
Inspector General
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Altmeyer Building, Suite 300
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Inspector General O'Carroll:

I want to alert you to two individuals who are reportedly collecting Social Security Disability Insurance ("SSDI") benefits, but who I believe merit additional review for eligibility. A recent episode of National Geographic's program "Taboo" highlighted adults who have adopted fantasy lifestyles to mimic the behaviors of babies.¹ The episode featured an interview with Stanley Thornton, a man who lives as an "adult baby" within the confines of his home, despite the fact that he is 29-years-old. Mr. Thornton reportedly lives in California together with Sandra Diaz, a woman who is a former nurse that cares for Mr. Thornton as if he was a baby.

As you know, the Social Security Administration ("SSA") administers the SSDI program, which provides cash benefits to qualifying individuals. To qualify for this program, a beneficiary must meet SSA criteria finding them disabled and unable to work at any job available in the national economy. Further, after admitting beneficiaries to the program, SSA is required to perform Continuing Disability Reviews to determine if beneficiaries remain disabled and continue to qualify for the program. The facts of these cases raise questions about whether the beneficiaries were ever rightfully admitted to the program, and whether proper follow-up has been conducted.

Mr. Thornton is cognizant that his choice to live as an adult baby violates societal norms, indicating that he is self-aware and able to make decisions for himself. In fact, during the episode, Mr. Thornton explained how he "switches to adult mode to avoid public shaming" and drives himself to a hardware store where he purchased lumber. Mr. Thornton used the lumber to build a "super-sized high chair" that he has been designing for a year-and-a-half. Mr. Thornton has also built other customized baby furniture, including a crib that he sleeps in nightly and a reinforced play yard that supports his nearly 350-pound body.

¹ National Geographic, "Taboo," <http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/player/national-geographic-channel/featured-videos-national-geographic-channel/ngc-adult-baby.html>.

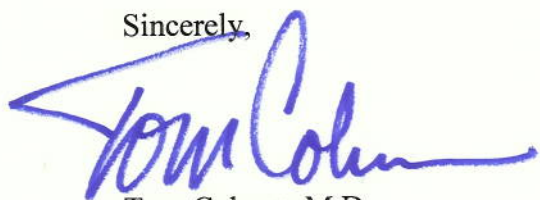
In the episode, viewers can see Mr. Thornton using power tools to custom-make the furniture. He also claims to administer an Internet-based support group for other "adult babies" like him, as well as their caregivers.

Reports state that both Mr. Thornton and Ms. Diaz are unemployed, but both collect Social Security disability benefits.² While it is unclear how Ms. Diaz is disabled, Mr. Thornton "used to work as a security guard, but had an accident and now claims disability benefits for a heart condition."³

Given that Mr. Thornton is able to determine what is appropriate attire and actions in public, drive himself to complete errands, design and custom-make baby furniture to support a 350-pound adult, and run an Internet support group, it is possible that he has been improperly collecting disability benefits for a period of time. Ms. Diaz may also be improperly collecting disability benefits since she is able to provide childcare to a 350-pound, 29-year-old man.

To maintain the integrity of the SSDI program, I request that your office conduct an investigation as to whether these individuals properly qualify for the program. If you have any questions, please contact Andrew Dockham at (202) 224-2224.

Sincerely,



Tom Coburn, M.D.
United States Senator

² Entertainment Tonight Online,
http://www.etonline.com/news/110341_WATCH_Enter_the_World_of_Adult_Babies/index.html.

³ Fiona Roberts, The 'Adult Baby': Man who wears diapers, sleeps in a crib and is bottle fed...at 30, Mail Online, May 4, 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1383496/Meet-Taboo-Fantasy-Lives-Stanley-Thornton-adult-baby.html>.