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SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Press Release

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<https://oig.ssa.gov>

New York Competitive Bodybuilder Pleads Guilty to Social Security Disability Fraud

The Inspector General for the Social Security Administration, Gail S. Ennis, is announcing the guilty plea of Robert Chiarello, to filing a false claim to receive more than \$145,000 in Social Security disability benefits. The Attorney General of New York charged Chiarello with falsely claiming that he was disabled due to injuries from a fall and, among other limitations, could not lift more than 10 pounds. During the time when he made these claims to Social Security, he was regularly competing in bodybuilding competitions in the New York area.

Based on false information Chiarello presented at a 2015 hearing before an administrative law judge, Social Security approved his disability claim, with payments beginning in March 2012. His benefits ceased in April, 2017 when the Social Security Office of the Inspector General (OIG) began investigating, after the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance received an anonymous complaint that Chiarello was a competitive bodybuilder.

The investigation gathered evidence, including photographs and video, that Chiarello was able to perform many types of activities without difficulty. The evidence also indicated that Chiarello was a bodybuilder who competed in numerous competitions, using a variety of aliases, including “Roberto Shirello,” “Michael Roberts,” and “Frank Gomez,” to conceal his identity.

As a result of the investigation, the New York Attorney General’s Office charged Chiarello with offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree, a class E felony. He pled guilty to one count of false filing in the second degree, a class A misdemeanor, before Supreme Court Judge William Condon in Suffolk County, New York. Following his plea, he paid \$145,457 in restitution to Social Security. A sentencing date is pending.

This case was investigated by the Social Security OIG’s New York Field Division, led by Special Agent-in-Charge John Grasso. Assistant Attorneys General Russell Satin and Meagan Powers are prosecuting this matter, under the supervision of the Public Integrity Bureau Chief, Travis Hill. Inspector General Ennis praised the Attorney General’s Office for its support of this investigation and dogged efforts to pursue justice and recover valuable Social Security funds.

Inspector General Ennis encourages the public to report suspected disability fraud online at <https://oig.ssa.gov>.

For press inquiries, contact Tracy Lyng, OIG Communications Director, at (410) 965-2671.