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SOCIAL SECURITY

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September 28, 2011

Ms. Rebecca S. Market
Attorney at Law
Freedom From Religion Foundation
P.O. Box 750
Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Ms. Market:

This letter is in response to your June 21, 2011 inquiry concerning our policy regarding the question asked during the Social Security benefit application process if the claimant has a religious record of birth established before age five. We regret the delay in responding.

We can understand your concerns about this matter and are sorry that you did not receive a response to your prior inquiry. The Code of Federal Regulation, 20 CFR 404.715 provides that we ask for evidence of age for certain types of benefits, and 20 CFR 404.716 specifies that preferred evidence of age is either a public record of age, established before age five or a religious record of age established before age five. The purpose of the question is to help our representatives identify which types of evidence the individual has readily available to them. Our intent is to make the submission of evidence as simple as possible for all of our applicants.

In light of your concerns, we agree that if an applicant has furnished an acceptable public record of birth, it is not necessary to ask whether he or she also has a religious record of age established before age five. Therefore, we will change our policy instructions so interviewers do not ask for a religious record of age in these situations.

We appreciate you bringing this matter to our attention. The views and suggestions of the public are helpful as look for ways to improve the programs that we administer and the services we provide. We especially appreciate suggestions that allow us to streamline our Social Security benefit application process.

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We hope you find this information helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth B. Bake". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Elizabeth B. Bake
Associate Commissioner
Office of Public Inquiries