

## AppalReD Legal Aid

Providing free legal services to the low-income and vulnerable in eastern and south central Kentucky



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## In Appalachia, A Lawyer's Vast Fraud Dogs Destitute Clients

By **Andrew Strickler** | July 14, 2019, 8:02 PM EDT

By the summer of 2007, Johnny McIntosh could barely walk, much less hold down a job.

At just 40 years old, McIntosh had a back injury from a public works job in his native eastern Kentucky, followed by a re-injury, debilitating pain, depression and suicide attempts.

His application for federal disability benefits, arranged through a flamboyant but well-regarded local lawyer named Eric Conn, was quickly approved. For years, McIntosh lived on a monthly check that by 2016 had grown to \$733.

But that May, a letter from the Social Security Administration informed him that his financial lifeline was being cut, and that all his medical records approved by a doctor Conn sent him to were being treated as fraudulent. Conn, it turns out, had been running the largest Social Security scam in U.S. history.

Today, McIntosh is one of thousands of people still trying to extricate himself from the rubble of Conn's racket — which included bribing an administrative judge to rubber-stamp benefit applications and paying off doctors — and convince the agency to restore their payments.

Now living as a squatter in a cabin without electricity owned by a relative, McIntosh has sold most of his possessions and says he feels "much older" than his 52 years.

# CONN

## BY THE NUMBERS

**\$550M**

SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS  
CONN SECURED FOR CLIENTS

**2,900**

NUMBER OF AFFECTED  
BENEFICIARIES

**\$609K**

CASH BRIBES PAID TO  
ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE

**27 YEARS**

FEDERAL PRISON SENTENCE

**\$72.5M**

RESTITUTION ORDER

**6K-7K**

CLIENT FILES UNCOVERED  
LAST YEAR IN CONN OFFICE

*SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE,  
COURT RECORDS*

"For a long time, it felt like I was being accused of stealing. I got harassing letters. There was a time the SSA was saying I owed them \$70,085, plus a nickel," he told Law360. "I'll never forget that number."

Four years have passed since the revelations of Conn's fraud led to the sudden suspension of checks for hundreds of people who came through Conn's wildly successful Social Security practice, at one time the largest in the state.

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