DOGE Staffer Broke Treasury Rules in Transmitting Personal Data

Gregory Korte and Erik Larson

(Bloomberg) -- A staffer for the Department of Government Efficiency violated Treasury Department policies when he sent a spreadsheet containing personal information to two other people in the Trump administration, a federal official revealed in a court filing Friday.

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That DOGE staffer was Marko Elez, who left his job tracking Treasury payments after social media posts linking him to racist beliefs surfaced online. He has since been rehired by DOGE at the Social Security Administration.

The details about the data exchange come out of a forensic analysis Treasury conducted as part of a lawsuit brought by New York and other state attorneys general attempting to halt President Donald Trump's efficiency initiative from accessing sensitive payment information about US taxpayers, contractors, employees and beneficiaries.

The violation raises concerns about the data security practices of DOGE's work at the Treasury Department and other agencies as it digs into sensitive government databases. A federal filing earlier this week noted that any disruptions to the Treasury payments systems "could have catastrophic consequences," including risking federal default on obligations or jeopardizing social support payments to millions of Americans.

The forensic analysis was conducted after the government revealed in an earlier court filing that Elez had briefly had read-write access to the payments data, when the court had previously been advised that his access was read-only. The analysis found that Elez did not make any changes to the payment data.

But after Elez resigned, Treasury found that he had emailed a spreadsheet containing personally identifiable information to two other officials at the General Services Administration, a separate agency that manages business operations for much of the federal government, according to the new filing.

The spreadsheet contained names — though Treasury didn't specify whether they were of individuals or entities — with the transaction type and an amount of money, according to the filing. Treasury also did not reveal how many payments were included.

"The names in the spreadsheet are considered low-risk PII because the names are not accompanied by more specific identifiers, such as social security numbers or birth dates," said the statement from David Ambrose, the chief privacy officer for the Bureau of the Fiscal Service.

But the distribution of personally identifiable information nonetheless violated Bureau of Fiscal Service's policies because it was not encrypted and Elez did not obtain prior written approval, he said.

In filings in a separate court case, the Social Security Administration said this week that DOGE staffers need access to sensitive data on Social Security beneficiaries so they "can review records needed to detect fraud." Elez is one of 10 DOGE staffers at the social insurance agency.

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The SSA and Elez did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The judge in the Treasury case last month blocked DOGE-affiliated employees from accessing Americans' personal and financial information at Treasury. But the judge gave the government an off-ramp, saying the Justice Department could seek to lift the injunction after providing details about training and vetting for DOGE employees. The filing on Friday outlined such training for the employee who replaced Elez, which specifically addressed the issues around his predecessor's violation.

The states that sued argued DOGE was putting Americans' data at risk by giving untrained staffers access to a vast trove of information. The data stems from a wide array of payments by the federal government to millions of Americans, including Social Security checks, veteran's benefits, Medicare and Medicaid payments and child-tax credits.

Before joining DOGE, Elez worked as an engineer for SpaceX and social-media platform X, two companies owed by billionaire Elon Musk. Trump has tasked Musk with a wide-ranging effort to rein in federal spending, and the Treasury's payments system — which contains some of the most sensitive, non-classified information the government keeps — was an early target of that effort.

In a separate court filing on Monday, the agency said that there were 10 DOGE staffers working on eliminating waste and fraud in the nation's social insurance program, and that they needed direct access to beneficiary data to do so.

(An AI summary previously at the top of the story was removed because it incorrectly said Elez had sent the spreadsheet after he resigned.)

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