



# PRESS RELEASE

## Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation *Chief Richard Weber*

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IRS – Criminal Investigation

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### **Georgia Man Pleads Guilty to Operating Unlicensed Money Transmitting Business**

*Defendant Cashed Fraudulent Tax Refund Checks Totaling More than \$1.3 Million*

A Columbus, Georgia, resident pleaded guilty to one count of operating an unlicensed money transmitting business, Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciralo of the Justice Department's Tax Division and U.S. Attorney Michael J. Moore of the Middle District of Georgia announced today.

According to court documents, between February 2013 and March 2014, Sawan Shah, aka Sunny, 43, owned, operated and managed several money transmitting companies in the Columbus area. Shah offered check-cashing services to the public, including cashing checks that exceeded \$1,000. Shah knew that he and his companies were required to be registered with Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) and with the state of Georgia. Neither Shah nor any of the businesses he controlled were registered with FinCEN or the state of Georgia as a money transmitting business or as a check cashier.

Several individuals approached Shah about cashing tax refund checks that were issued in the names of other individuals. Shah agreed to do so and did not require proof of identification for the individuals listed on the checks. Shah charged fees between 10 and 30 percent of the check's worth, due to his knowledge that the checks were involved in tax fraud. In 2013 and 2014, Shah cashed approximately 567 federal tax refund checks that totaled \$1,357,476.18. Those refund checks were the result of fraudulent claims for refund submitted in the names of stolen identities.

A sentencing hearing has been scheduled for Jan. 26, 2016. Shah faces a statutory maximum sentence of five years in prison. Shah agreed to a forfeiture order in the amount of \$1,357,476.18.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciralo and U.S. Attorney Moore commended special agents of Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation and the U.S. Secret Service, who investigated the case, and Trial Attorney Michael C. Boteler of the Tax Division and Assistant U.S. Attorney Crawford L. Seals of the Middle District of Georgia, who are prosecuting the case.

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