



PRESS RELEASE

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DC Man Pleads Guilty to Federal Charges for Role in Massive Identity Theft and Tax Fraud Scheme

A District of Columbia resident pleaded guilty today to a charge stemming from his involvement in a far-reaching stolen identity refund fraud scheme in which he and others working with him obtained more than \$315,000 through the filing of fraudulent federal income tax returns seeking refunds, the Justice Department announced.

Ezekiel Raspberry, 39, is the second defendant to plead guilty to federal charges in recent weeks. Approximately 14 people have pleaded guilty to charges in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. According to court documents, the overall case involves the filing of at least 12,000 fraudulent federal income tax returns that sought refunds of at least \$40 million from the U.S. Treasury.

The guilty plea was announced by Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciralo of the Justice Department's Tax Division, U.S. Attorney Channing D. Phillips of the District of Columbia, Special Agent in Charge Thomas Jankowski of the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI), Inspector in Charge David G. Bowers, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Washington Division and Assistant Inspector General for Investigations John L. Phillips of the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

Raspberry pleaded guilty to conspiracy to defraud the United States with respect to claims. Under federal sentencing guidelines, Raspberry faces at his Jan. 15, 2016 sentencing, an advisory guideline range of 24 to 30 months in prison and a fine of up to \$50,000 at his sentencing before the Honorable U.S. District Judge Ellen S. Huvelle of the District of Columbia. In addition, as part of his plea agreement, Raspberry must pay \$315,076 in restitution to the IRS.

According to the government's evidence, Raspberry participated in a massive and sophisticated stolen identity refund fraud scheme that involved an extensive network of more than 130 people, many of whom were receiving public assistance. The refunds were sought for tax years 2005 through 2012, often in the names of people whose identities had been stolen, including the elderly, people in assisted living facilities, drug addicts and incarcerated prisoners. In other cases, the refunds were sent to people who were willing participants in the scheme. The refunds listed more than 400 "taxpayer" addresses located in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia.

According to documents filed with the court, from September 2008 through November 2010, Raspberry and others conspired to defraud the IRS of approximately \$315,076 through the filing of 145 fraudulent federal income tax returns. Raspberry received refund checks from a co-conspirator and deposited them into his bank account. He would then withdraw the funds and provide them to the co-conspirator, keeping a portion of the proceeds for himself.

The refund checks were generated by filing false U.S. federal income tax returns, attaching the Schedule C or C-EZ Net Profit From Business, which falsely claimed that each “taxpayer” operated a business as a sole proprietorship, including a “barber” or “childcare.” The returns falsely stated that the “taxpayer” had gross receipts and two or more dependent children, when, in fact, the “taxpayer” was either a victim of identity theft, was misled into providing his or her identifying information, or was a willing participant in the scheme. No such business had been operated by the “taxpayer” and the “taxpayer” had no such dependents.

In a related action, Bernard Rankin, 43, of Glenarden, Maryland, pleaded guilty on Nov. 4, to conspiracy to defraud the United States with respect to claims. Rankin admitted permitting the use of his residential address and bank account in the scheme and recruiting another individual to deposit fraudulently obtained tax refund checks into that individual’s bank account as well.

In announcing the pleas, Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciraolo, U.S. Attorney Phillips, Special Agent in Charge Jankowski, Inspector in Charge Bowers and Assistant Inspector General Phillips commended those who investigated the case. They also acknowledged the efforts of those who worked on the case from the U.S. Attorney’s Office of the District of Columbia, including former Assistant U.S. Attorney Sherri L. Schornstein and Paralegal Specialist Donna Galindo. Finally, they expressed appreciation for the work of Assistant U.S. Attorney Ellen Chubin Epstein of the District of Columbia’s Fraud and Public Corruption Section and Trial Attorneys Jeffrey B. Bender and Thomas F. Koelbl and former Trial Attorney Jessica Moran of the Tax Division, who prosecuted the case.

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