



PRESS RELEASE

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IRS – Criminal Investigation

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Former Bank Teller Pleads Guilty to Theft of Public Money

A Columbus, Georgia resident pleaded guilty today to one count of conspiracy to commit theft of public money, announced Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciralo of the Justice Department's Tax Division and Acting U.S. Attorney G.F. "Pete" Peterman, III for the Middle District of Georgia.

According to court documents, Vicky Wheeler, 54, worked as a bank teller at a Suntrust Bank branch in Columbus. Between February 2013 and May 2014, Wheeler cashed fraudulent tax refund checks at the request of several individuals in exchange for a fee. These individuals informed Wheeler that the tax refund checks were generated from tax returns filed using stolen identities. To disguise the fraudulent nature of the checks, Wheeler made false entries on the face of the checks to make it appear as if she received identification when the checks were cashed. Wheeler never received any forms of identification. In total, Wheeler received and cashed approximately 361 fraudulent tax refund checks that claimed \$780,760.17 in tax refunds.

Sentencing is scheduled for April 12, 2016. Wheeler faces a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000, or twice the loss from the offense. As per the plea agreement, Wheeler agreed to pay restitution in the amount of \$780,760.17.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciralo and Acting U.S. Attorney Peterman 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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