



# PRESS RELEASE

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

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IRS – Criminal Investigation

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### **Florida Couple Plead Guilty in Stolen Identity Refund Fraud Scheme**

A Pembroke Pines, Florida, couple pleaded guilty for conspiring to use stolen identities to file fraudulent tax returns with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), announced Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciraolo of the Justice Department's Tax Division, U.S. Attorney Wifredo Ferrer of the Southern District of Florida and Special Agent in Charge Kelly R. Jackson of IRS-Criminal Investigation, Miami Field Office.

According to court documents, between July 2009 and August 2014, Walther Wilson Godfrey, 37; Rhonda Peggy Gittens, 35, and others conspired to defraud the United States by filing false federal income tax returns using stolen identities. Gittens owned and operated 2G Inc., a tax return preparation business and G&G Check Cashing Inc., a check cashing business, both of which were located in Pembroke Pines. Godfrey and Gittens obtained the personal identification information of actual individuals, some deceased, including names, social security numbers, addresses and dates of birth, without the individuals' authorization and used this information to file false income tax refund claims for 2009 through 2011. Gittens and Godfrey recruited a co-conspirator to obtain Electronic Filing Identification Numbers (EFINs) in his name that would be used to file the fraudulent income tax returns. In addition, Godfrey and Gittens directed Brown to set up companies and bank accounts in his name in order to negotiate the fraudulently obtained income tax refund checks. Godfrey and Gittens filed more than 700 fraudulent tax returns requesting more than \$1.9 million in income tax refunds. In addition, Godfrey and Gittens possessed device-making equipment including an identification card printer, a credit card embosser, hologram stickers for driver's licenses and credit cards and blank credit cards.

Godfrey and Gittens pleaded guilty to one count of a multi-object conspiracy to defraud the United States, commit wire fraud and commit aggravated identity theft, one count of aggravated identity theft and one count of access device fraud. Both individuals face a statutory maximum sentence of five years in prison and three years of supervised release for the conspiracy charge, a statutory mandatory sentence of two years in prison and one year of supervised release for the aggravated identity theft charge and a statutory maximum sentence of 15 years in prison and three years of supervised release for the access device fraud charge. Godfrey and Gittens must serve the two year sentence for aggravated identity theft in addition to any sentence the court imposes on the other charges. Each charge also carries a maximum fine of \$250,000. The maximum statutory sentences are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes, as the sentencing of the defendants will be determined by the court based on the advisory Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciraolo and U.S. Attorney Ferrer commended special agents of IRS-Criminal Investigation, who investigated the case and Assistant U.S. Attorney Neil Karadbil of the Southern District of Florida and Assistant Chief Greg Tortella of the Tax Division, who prosecuted the case.

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