



PRESS RELEASE

Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation *Chief Richard Weber*

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IRS – Criminal Investigation

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Alabama Loan Company Employee Pleads Guilty to Stealing Identities Used to File False Income Tax Returns

A Montgomery County, Alabama, resident pleaded guilty today to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft, announced Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciralo of the Justice Department's Tax Division and U.S. Attorney George L. Beck Jr. of the Middle District of Alabama.

According to court documents, between January 2013 and August 2015, Wendy Huff, worked at two loan companies in Montgomery, Alabama, and had access to the means of identification of customers, including their names, social security numbers and dates of birth. Huff agreed to steal names from her employers and provide them to James Vernon Battle, identified as a co-conspirator in the indictment. The government alleges that Battle used those names to file over 335 returns claiming more than \$400,000 in fraudulent refunds and that he directed the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to issue the anticipated tax refunds in the form of prepaid debit cards and U.S. Treasury checks, which were mailed to addresses in Montgomery including Huff's residence. Huff subsequently delivered the prepaid debit cards to Battle. The government further alleges that Battle brought several U.S. Treasury checks to Huff's workplace where she used her position to cash them. Huff returned half of the proceeds to Battle and kept the balance for herself.

Huff faces a statutory maximum sentence of five years in prison for the conspiracy charge and a mandatory minimum sentence of two years in prison for the aggravated identity theft charge, which will be in addition to any other term of imprisonment she receives. She also faces substantial monetary penalties and restitution. Sentencing is set for July 14. Battle's trial is scheduled to begin during the week of April 11.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciralo and U.S. Attorney Beck Jr. commended special agents of IRS-Criminal Investigation and the U.S. Secret Service, who investigated the case and Trial Attorneys Michael C. Boteler and Robert J. Boudreau of the Tax Division and Assistant U.S. Attorney Jonathan Ross of the Middle District of Alabama, who are prosecuting this case.

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