



PRESS RELEASE

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IRS – Criminal Investigation

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Georgia Bank Teller Sentenced to Prison for Cashing Fraudulently Obtained Income Tax Refund Checks

A Columbus, Georgia resident was sentenced to 37 months in prison today for her role in a stolen identity refund fraud scheme, announced Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciralo, head of the Justice Department's Tax Division, and U.S. Attorney G.F. Peterman III for the Middle District of Georgia.

Between June 2012 and December 2013, Tonya Alexander worked as a bank teller at SunTrust Bank in Columbus. Alexander received and cashed fraudulently obtained income tax refund checks in exchange for a fee. Alexander's co-conspirators, including Tracy Mitchell, Keisha Lanier and others, filed fraudulent income tax returns using stolen identities and directed other co-conspirators to bring the fraudulently obtained refund checks to Alexander to cash. Alexander received and cashed approximately 330 fraudulently obtained tax refund checks that totaled more than \$600,000. Alexander also recruited another bank teller, co-conspirator Vicky Wheeler, to assist in cashing the tax refund checks.

On Aug. 5, Alexander pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit theft of public money. In addition to the term of prison imposed, Alexander was also ordered to serve three years of supervised release and to pay \$606,008.38 in restitution to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Keisha Lanier was previously sentenced to 15 years in prison on Sept. 25, 2015. Tracy Mitchell was sentenced to 13 years and 3 months in prison on Aug. 7, 2015.

Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Ciralo and U.S. Attorney Peterman commended special agents of IRS-Criminal Investigation and the U.S. Secret Service, who conducted the investigation, 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 prosecuted the case.

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