



PRESS RELEASE

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IRS – Criminal Investigation

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Check Casher Sentenced to Prison for Cashing Fraudulently Obtained Tax Refund Checks

Cashed More Than 250 Checks Worth Approximately \$645,000

A Columbus, Georgia resident was sentenced to 18 months in prison today for his role in a stolen identity refund fraud scheme, announced Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Stuart M. Goldberg of the Justice Department's Tax Division and U.S. Attorney G.F. Peterman III for the Middle District of Georgia.

According to documents filed with the court, George Rowell, 61, owned and operated Big O's Package Store in Columbus, which offered check-cashing services. Between February 2012 and March 2013, federal agents approached Rowell about cashing fraudulently obtained refund checks for people whose names did not appear on the checks. Despite being warned, Rowell cashed checks in bulk for several co-conspirators even though the checks were not in their names. Rowell also allowed at least one co-conspirator to forge in front of him the signature of the taxpayers to whom the checks were made payable. Rowell charged his co-conspirators a 10 percent fee and in 2013 cashed over 250 refund checks worth more than \$645,000.

In addition to the term of prison imposed, Rowell was ordered to serve three years of supervised release and to pay restitution to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in the amount of \$645,343.03. Rowell pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit theft of public money in August 2016.

Rowell's co-conspirators previously pleaded guilty and were sentenced to prison. In Dec. 2016, Tonya Alexander was sentenced to serve 37 months in prison. In September 2015, Keisha Lanier was sentenced to serve 15 years in prison. In August 2015, Tracy Mitchell was sentenced to serve 13 years and three months in prison.

Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Goldberg 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 are prosecuting the case.

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