



PRESS RELEASE

Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation *Chief Richard Weber*

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Georgia Husband and Wife Plead Guilty In Stolen Identity Tax Refund Fraud Scheme Involving IRS “Get Transcript” Database

Used Stolen Personally Identifiable Information to Gain Access to the Get Transcript Database

An Austell, Georgia husband and wife pleaded guilty today to charges relating to their involvement in a stolen identity income tax refund fraud scheme, announced Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciralo of the Justice Department’s Tax Division and U.S. Attorney John A. Horn of the Northern District of Georgia.

Anthony Alika, 42, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering. His wife Sonia Alika, 27, pleaded guilty to one count of illegally structuring cash withdrawals to evade bank reporting requirements.

“The IRS is committed to working with our law enforcement partners to pursue identity thieves, and we continue to make important progress in Georgia as well as elsewhere across the country,” said IRS Commissioner John Koskinen. “The IRS is also continuing to strengthen its operations and working with state revenue departments and the tax industry to provide further protections for taxpayers against identity theft.”

“With the number of stolen identity refund fraud victims increasing at an alarming rate, the Justice Department, working with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and its other federal, state and local law enforcement partners, remains committed to investigating these abusive schemes and criminal networks, prosecuting these offenders, and seeking lengthy prison terms and monetary penalties,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciralo. “The guilty pleas of Anthony Alika, Sonia Alika and Rapheal Atebefia in connection with their attempt to infiltrate and abuse the “Get Transcript” database are yet another example of these continued efforts. The investigation and successful prosecution of these defendants sends a clear message to those individuals engaged in, or considering, this criminal conduct that the Department will bring all available resources to bear to hold them accountable.”

“Criminals continually discover more sophisticated methods of stealing personal information and unfortunately seek to capitalize on this theft by filing phony tax returns demanding excessive refunds,” said U.S. Attorney Horn. “Because this is a growing problem, we are applying additional resources to help stem the tide and protect both our personal information and precious tax dollars.”

In January 2016, Anthony Alika and Sonia Alika were charged with laundering the proceeds from a stolen identity refund fraud scheme. The indictment alleged that Anthony Alika, along with Rapheal Atebefia, 33, of Austell, Georgia, obtained means of identification of actual individuals, including their names and social security numbers, and used this information to access the IRS “Get Transcript” database. The indictment further alleged that Anthony Alika, Atebefia, and others obtained prepaid debit cards from stores located in multiple states, registered the cards in the names of the stolen identities, filed false income tax returns using the stolen identities and information obtained from the Get Transcript database, and directed the IRS to deposit the tax refunds onto these cards. To conceal their fraud, Anthony Alika, Atebefia and others were alleged to have used the prepaid debit cards to purchase money orders, which Anthony Alika, Sonia Alika and Atebefia deposited into bank accounts and then structured cash withdrawals of the proceeds in order to prevent the bank from filing Currency Transaction Reports (CTRs).

As part of his guilty plea, Anthony Alika admitted that during 2015 he received money orders from several individuals and deposited those money orders into bank accounts in his name or had his wife deposit them into bank accounts in her name. Anthony Alika would then structure out cash withdrawals from his bank accounts in amounts less than \$10,000 to evade the bank reporting requirements. Anthony Alika admitted that the funds used to purchase the money orders were the proceeds of illegal activity, including the filing of fraudulent tax returns using stolen identities. Sonia Alika admitted as part of her guilty plea that between February and June 2015, she withdrew more than \$250,000 from multiple bank accounts she controlled in amounts less than \$10,000 to prevent the bank from filing CTRs.

U.S. District Judge Thomas W. Thrash, Jr. set sentencing for July 27. Anthony Alika faces a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and Sonia Alika faces a statutory maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. They also face substantial monetary penalties, restitution and forfeiture. In March, Atebefia pleaded guilty to one count of money laundering for his role in this scheme. He is scheduled to be sentenced on June 22.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciralo and U.S. Attorney Horn commended special agents of IRS-Criminal Investigation and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, who investigated the case and Trial Attorneys Michael C. Boteler and Charles M. Edgar, Jr. of the Tax Division and Assistant U.S. Attorney Brian Pearce of the Northern District of Georgia, who are prosecuting this case.

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