



PRESS RELEASE

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IRS – Criminal Investigation

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Florida Couple Sentenced to Prison for Involvement in Stolen Identity Tax Refund Fraud Scheme

*Conspired to File Fraudulent Income Tax Returns Claiming Over \$1.5 Million in Tax
Refunds Using Stolen Names and Social Security Numbers*

A Pembroke Pines, Florida couple was sentenced to prison for their role in a stolen identity tax refund fraud scheme, announced Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciralo of the Justice Department's Tax Division, U.S. Attorney Wifredo Ferrer of the Southern District of Florida and Special Agent in Charge Kelly Jackson of the Internal Revenue Service–Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI).

On June 16, U.S. District Judge Beth Bloom for the Southern District of Florida sentenced Rhonda Perry Gittens, 35, to serve 75 months in prison, followed by three years of supervised release. Gittens' boyfriend and co-conspirator, Walther Wilson Godfrey, 37, was previously sentenced on April 15 to serve 75 months in prison, followed by three years of supervised release. Judge Bloom also ordered Godfrey and Gittens to pay \$792,442 in restitution to the IRS. Godfrey and Gittens pleaded guilty in January 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.

"The sentences imposed by Judge Bloom reflect the serious harm caused by the defendants' scheme to enrich themselves at the expense of the U.S. Treasury and their identity theft victims," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciralo. "The defendants attempted to hide behind a veneer of corporate and nominee identities that ultimately provided no bar to the investigative efforts of our law enforcement partners. Return preparers who seek to profit through false tax returns face harsh punishment and the result in this case should deter other individuals from engaging in similar schemes."

"This sentence should serve as a warning to anyone who seeks to commit tax fraud or identity theft that federal law enforcement resources will be marshalled against them to discover their crimes and bring them to justice," said U.S. Attorney Ferrer. "We will continue to work tirelessly with all our law enforcement partners to prosecute those crimes."

"IRS Criminal Investigation (CI) will continue to investigate those who attempt to defraud our nation's tax system, and we will continue to fight for the innocent victims whose identities are

being used in these stolen identity tax refund fraud schemes,” stated Special Agent in Charge Jackson of IRS-CI. “We are pleased with these sentences, as the defendants are being held accountable for attempting to steal more than \$1.5 million from the IRS, possessing device-making equipment for driver’s licenses and credit cards, and recruiting another individual to participate in the crime.”

According to court documents and evidence presented at the sentencing hearing, between July 2009 and August 2014, Godfrey, Gittens 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, to prepare and file false income tax refund claims for the years 2009 through 2011. Godfrey and Gittens recruited a co-conspirator, Marc Brown, to put Electronic Filing Identification Numbers (EFINs) in his name through which fraudulent income tax returns would be filed. In addition, Godfrey and Gittens directed Brown to set up companies and bank accounts in his name to negotiate the fraudulently obtained income tax refund checks. Godfrey and Gittens filed more than 700 fraudulent tax returns requesting more than \$1.5 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.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciruolo and U.S. Attorney Ferrer commended special agents of IRS-CI, 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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