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PRESS RELEASE

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District Man Sentenced to 18 Months in Prison For Role in Massive Identity Theft and Tax Fraud Scheme Worked With Others to Obtain More Than \$315,000 in Fraudulent Refunds

WASHINGTON – A resident of the District of Columbia was sentenced today to 18 months in prison for his involvement in a far-reaching stolen identity refund fraud scheme in which he worked with others to obtain over \$315,000 in income tax refunds through the filing of fraudulent federal income tax returns, announced U.S. Attorney Channing D. Phillips, Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciruolo of the Justice Department's Tax Division, Special Agent in Charge Thomas Jankowski of the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI), Inspector in Charge), Inspector in Charge Maria L. Kelokates of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Washington Division, and Assistant Inspector General for Investigations John L. Phillips of the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

Ezekiel Raspberry, 39, is among approximately 16 participants in this scheme who have pleaded guilty to charges in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. According to court documents, the overall case involves the filing of at least 12,000 fraudulent federal income tax returns that sought refunds of at least \$42 million. Raspberry pleaded guilty on Nov. 10, 2015, to conspiracy to defraud the United States with respect to claims. Following his prison term, Raspberry will be placed on three years of supervised release. During that time, he must perform 100 hours of community service. In addition, U.S. District Judge Ellen S. Huvelle of the District of Columbia ordered Raspberry to pay \$315,076 in restitution to the IRS.

According to the government's evidence, Raspberry participated in a massive and sophisticated stolen identity refund fraud scheme that involved an extensive network of more than 130 people, many of whom were receiving public assistance. The refunds were sought for tax years 2005 through 2012, often in the names of people, whose identities had been stolen, including the elderly, people in assisted living facilities, drug addicts and incarcerated prisoners. In other cases, the refunds were sent to people who were willing participants in the

scheme. The refunds listed more than 400 “taxpayer” addresses located in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia.

According to documents filed with the court, from September 2008 through November 2010, Raspberry and others conspired to defraud the IRS of approximately \$315,076 through the filing of 145 fraudulent federal income tax returns. Raspberry received refund checks from a co-conspirator and deposited them into his bank account. He would then withdraw the funds and provide them to the co-conspirator, keeping a portion of the proceeds for himself.

The refund checks were generated by filing false federal income tax returns that included Schedules C or C-EZ that falsely claimed that each “taxpayer” operated a business, such as “barber” or “childcare,” as a sole proprietorship. The returns falsely stated that the “taxpayer” had gross receipts and two or more dependent children, when, in fact, the “taxpayer” was either a victim of identity theft, was misled into providing his or her identifying information, or was a willing participant in the scheme. The businesses listed on the Schedules C and C-EZ were entirely fictitious.

In a related case this week, Rashida King, 41, of Savannah, Georgia, pleaded guilty on Jan. 14 to conspiracy to defraud the United States with respect to claims. According to court documents, King deposited at least 33 fraudulently obtained U.S. Treasury checks into her back account. A sentencing date has not yet been set.

In announcing the sentence, U.S. Attorney Phillips, Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciruolo, Special Agent in Charge Jankowski, Inspector in Charge Kelokates, and Assistant Inspector General for Investigations Phillips commended those who investigated the case. They also acknowledged the efforts of those who worked on the case from the U.S. Attorney’s Office of the District of Columbia, including former Assistant U.S. Attorney Sherri L. Schornstein and Paralegal Specialists Donna Galindo and Julie Dailey. Finally, they expressed appreciation for the work of Assistant U.S. Attorney Ellen Chubin Epstein of the District of Columbia’s Fraud and Public Corruption Section and Trial Attorneys Jeffrey B. Bender and Thomas F. Koelbl and former Trial Attorney Jessica Moran of the Tax Division, who prosecuted the case.