



PRESS RELEASE

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THREE JACKSONVILLE WOMEN CHARGED IN FRAUDULENT INCOME TAX REFUND SCHEME

Jacksonville, Florida - United States Attorney Paul I. Perez announced today the unsealing of an 80 count indictment charging Vanessa Hampton, age 45, Latavia Evans, age 29, and Regina Williams, age 30, all residents of Jacksonville, with conspiracy to defraud the Internal Revenue Service, filing false claims for income tax refunds, and bank fraud. All three were arrested today in Jacksonville without incident. They made their initial appearance before the Honorable Magistrate Judge Thomas E. Morris. All three pled not guilty and they are being detained until their detention hearing which is scheduled for 11:00 a.m. tomorrow morning before Judge Morris. The maximum penalties the defendants face if convicted on all counts are more than 450 years' imprisonment and fines of more than \$16 million.

According to the indictment, during the filing seasons for the tax years 1999 through 2001, Hampton, Evans, and Williams allegedly operated a scheme in and around Jacksonville in which they created false Forms W-2 for themselves and for individuals they recruited to participate in the scheme. The indictment further alleges that Hampton, Evans,

Williams, and the recruited individuals then took these false Forms W-2 to legitimate tax return preparation businesses, such as Jackson Hewitt, where the Forms W-2 were used to create false federal income tax returns, which fraudulently claimed that the listed taxpayers were entitled to receive substantial refunds from the IRS. These false returns were filed electronically with the IRS through the tax return preparation businesses. For each of these returns, a Refund Anticipation Loan was requested. These loans, which were issued through federally insured financial institutions, allowed the participants in the scheme to receive advance payment of the false refunds, typically within one to two days after the returns were electronically filed. According to the indictment, usually one or more of the defendants would accompany the recruited individuals to pick up the refund checks, and would take them to cash the checks. The defendants would then take and keep a portion of the proceeds from the recruited individuals.

The indictment alleges that, during the course of the conspiracy, the defendants caused at least 33 false income tax returns to be filed, fraudulently claiming refunds of approximately \$138,091 from the United States. The indictment further charges the defendants with defrauding Santa Barbara Bank & Trust, which issued the Refund Anticipation Loans obtained through the scheme.

The case was investigated by the Internal Revenue Service, and will be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Scot Morris and Department of Justice Tax Division Trial Attorney Jenny Grus.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.