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**MELTON PLEADS GUILTY TO TAX FRAUD AND IDENTITY THEFT**

Greenbelt, Maryland - Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that today Michael M. Melton, age 31, of Fitzgerald, Georgia, pled guilty before United States District Court Judge Peter J. Messitte to submitting false tax returns and stealing the identities of at least 11 other individuals.

Melton is a semi-pro basketball player who once worked for the Prince George's County school system. In the spring of 2002, Melton submitted at least 11 false and fraudulent personal income tax returns seeking refunds from the United States Department of the Treasury. In preparing these false claims, Melton stole the identities of at least 11 other individuals and used their names, dates of birth, and social security numbers without their authorization. The majority of these victims were minors who had all been housed at a youth detention facility in Georgia where Melton had once been employed. On at least one other occasion, Melton stole the identity of an acquaintance to open a bank account to serve as the repository for the electronically transferred funds derived from his fraudulent claims.

Melton was charged this year in a 23 count indictment alleging both tax fraud and identity

theft. In pleading guilty to one count of tax fraud and one count of identity theft, Melton admitted that the total amount of income tax refunds fraudulently claimed by him exceeded \$40,000.

Melton faces a maximum sentence of 5 years in prison for the tax fraud charge, and 3 years in prison for the identity theft charge. His sentencing is scheduled for November 15, 2004.

The case was investigated by the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation Division and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Chan Park.