



# Department of Justice

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## **TWO SEPARATE FRAUD SCHEMES SERVE AS WARNING TO POTENTIAL VICTIMS**

ATLANTA, GA - The United States Attorney's Office in Atlanta today announced two separate court actions involving fraud schemes that could potentially involve more victims, and that serve as a warning to citizens to be careful about both the use of their identities and their investments.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias advises, "We have many fraud cases involving the theft of our citizens' names, social security numbers, tax information, and of course, their hard-earned money. It is important for everyone to be careful about who gets their money and their identifying information. Many people simply do not check out where their money and information are going, and this lack of diligence is the backbone of many fraud schemes."

Rebecca A. Sparkman, Special Agent In Charge, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, said: "Money laundering is not a victimless crime. Not only are innocent people duped by schemes such as these, but the underground, untaxed economy harms the entire nation's economic strength."

ANTHONY G. CHRISTOU, 56, of Dunwoody, Georgia was arraigned today on federal charges of wire fraud and money laundering relating to his alleged execution of a \$32 million Ponzi scheme. The indictment on which CHRISTOU was arraigned charges that he lied to investors about short term, high yield "bridge loans" he was purportedly underwriting, when in fact he was merely using later investors' capital contributions to pay off the significant principal and interest obligations he owed to earlier investors. The indictment also charges that CHRISTOU stole more than \$5 million in investor assets in 2005 alone to fund extensive gambling activity at casinos in Nevada, New Jersey and Mississippi.

CHRISTOU was indicted by a federal grand jury on November 20, 2006. According to the indictment, CHRISTOU engaged in a scheme where he and others acting on his behalf solicited individuals to invest with him. CHRISTOU informed his investors that he would use their money to underwrite safe and secure "bridge loans" for wealthy individuals who were selling a house and needed funds to use as a down payment on newly acquired real

property. According to CHRISTOU, his investors' money would be secured by the equity in the borrower's existing property and would be repaid, with interest, to the investors when the borrower's existing property was sold. As part of the scheme, CHRISTOU informed his investors that they would receive a high rate of return on their investment. Between January 2005 and January 2006, CHRISTOU received approximately \$32,000,000 from investors, including by interstate wire transfers, but did not use any of the money to fund bridge loans. Instead, he allegedly used his investors' funds to repay principal and interest payments to earlier investors and also, unbeknownst to his investors, transferred \$5.1 million in investor assets to purchase gambling accounts, or "markers," at casinos in Nevada, Mississippi, and New Jersey. A trial date for CHRISTOU has not yet been set.

In another case sentenced in federal court late yesterday, LISA MELINDA LYLE, 39, of Winder, Georgia, was sentenced to 2 years, 6 months in federal prison, and ordered to pay \$74,419 in restitution to the IRS, a fine of \$1,000, after pleading guilty to six counts of making false claims against the United States by filing false tax returns and four counts of knowingly using other persons' names and social security numbers to make false claims.

For the tax years 1999 through 2001, LYLE electronically filed federal tax returns online, claiming refunds were owed to the taxpayer. She filed returns in her own name and in the names of family members and acquaintances. The returns contained false information relating to the employment and earnings of the taxpayers and were supported by fraudulent W-2s. Some of the taxpayers were aware that LYLE had prepared a tax return in their names. When interviewed, they stated that they had given LYLE correct information, but that LYLE, without their knowledge or permission, had filed the returns with incorrect information. Other individuals had no knowledge that LYLE had filed a tax return in their names, using their social security numbers. The employers on the W-2s were also interviewed and confirmed that the information on the W-2s was false. Some of the refunds were deposited into bank accounts belonging to LYLE, her relatives, or a friend of LYLE's. In other cases, refund checks were mailed to LYLE at her address or at the addresses of relatives or acquaintances, who would then turn the funds over to LYLE. LYLE was indicted in March 2006.

Members of the public are reminded that the indictment contains only allegations. A defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove a defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

Both cases are being investigated by Special Agents of the Department of Treasury, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation.

Assistant United States Attorney Teresa D. Hoyt prosecuted the LYLE case, and Assistant United States Attorneys Paul N. Monnin, Aaron M. Danzig and Randy S. Chartash are prosecuting the CHRISTOU case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias (pronounced NAH-me-us), United States Attorney; Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney; through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is [www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan).