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## News Release

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### **Four individuals sentenced for their roles in large, multi-state identity theft ring**

*(17 members of theft ring have been sentenced; 15 others await sentencing)*

MINNEAPOLIS—Earlier today in federal court in St. Paul, four individuals were sentenced for their roles in a large, multi-state, identity theft ring. United States District Court Judge Paul A. Magnuson sentenced Donyea Terrell Collins, age 27, of Richfield, to 55 months in prison; Derek Charles Estelle, age 25, of Stillwater, to 30 months in prison; and Kelly Jenelle Scott, age 44, no known address, to 46 months in prison. All three had earlier pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit bank fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. Judge Magnuson also sentenced Lee Vang, age 32, of St. Paul, to 30 months in prison on one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering and one count of aggravated identity theft. Vang had also previously pled guilty to these charges.

These individuals, along with over 100 others, were involved in a conspiracy from 2006 through December of 2011 to defraud banks, bank customers, and businesses. The co-conspirators used victim information to create counterfeit checks and false identification documents to conduct fraudulent transactions at retail establishments, where expensive merchandise was purchased and returned for cash, and at banks, where the conspirators posed as customers and withdrew money from victims' bank accounts. The members of the

conspiracy conducted these fraudulent transactions throughout Minnesota and in at least 13 other states. Victim information was obtained by members of the conspiracy through multiple sources, including from individuals who stole victim information from their places of employment, from individuals employed at area banks, from those who stole the information from the mail, during vehicle break-ins, and business burglaries, among other sources.

Following sentencing, Patrick Henry, the head of the Minnesota Financial Crimes Task Force, said, "This investigation came together as a result of the partnerships between agencies and the extraordinary efforts of all involved. The Minnesota Financial Crimes Task Force led this investigation, but this is an example of successful collaboration of local, state, and federal criminal justice agencies."

Kelly R. Jackson, Special Agent in Charge of IRS Criminal Investigations, St. Paul Field Office, which also participated in the investigation, said, "Individuals who commit identity fraud of this magnitude deserve to be punished to the fullest extent of the law. These individuals caused immeasurable hardship to innocent victims. IRS Criminal Investigations remains committed to the pursuit of identity theft, and together with our law enforcement partners and the U.S. Attorney's Office, we will hold those who engage in similar behavior fully accountable."

Several other defendants have been sentenced in this case thus far. On June 20, 2013, Patricia Grace Pnewski, age 52, of South St. Paul, was sentenced to time served on one count of conspiracy to commit bank fraud. She pleaded guilty on February 6, 2012. Also on June 20, Cynthia Andrea Maxwell, age 45, of St. Paul, was sentenced to 12 months and one day in prison on one count of conspiracy to commit concealment money laundering. She pleaded guilty on July 12, 2012. Judge Magnuson also sentenced Vinicia Andrell Williamson, age 28, of Minneapolis, to 24 months in prison on one count of conspiracy to commit bank fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. She pleaded guilty on August 1, 2012.

On June 19, 2013, five co-conspirators were sentenced each on one count of conspiracy to commit bank fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. Christeena Janell Barker, age 46, no known address, was sentenced to 48 months in prison. She pleaded guilty on January 19, 2012. Brianna Marie Blegen, age 26, of Ham Lake, was sentenced to 24 months in prison. She pleaded guilty on June 6, 2012. Jacqueline Cleveland, age 55, of Bloomington, was sentenced to 26 months in prison. She pleaded guilty on April 11, 2012. Melissa Jean Beaman, age 37, of St. Louis Park, was sentenced to 24 months and one day in prison. She pleaded guilty on January 9, 2012. Robin Dawn Finger, age 44, of St. Paul, was sentenced to 34 months in prison. She pleaded guilty on June 21, 2012.

Also on June 19, Brianna Marie Darwin, age 27, of St. Paul, was sentenced to 24 months in prison on one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering and one count of aggravated identity theft. She pleaded guilty on July 20, 2011.

On June 14, 2013, four co-conspirators were sentenced each on one count of conspiracy to commit bank fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. Jamie Hubert Branson, age 47, of Minneapolis, was sentenced to 43 months in prison. He pleaded guilty on January 19, 2012.

Ginger Loucina Halliburton, age 46, of St. Paul, was sentenced to 30 months in prison. She pleaded guilty on February 8, 2013. Majorie Marie Neely, age 51, of Red Wing, was sentenced to 43 months in prison. She pleaded guilty on January 10, 2012. Darryl Alan Brant, age 55, of St. Paul, was sentenced to 30 months in prison. He pleaded guilty on January 19, 2012.

In a related case, four additional individuals, Jemall Ronta Williams, Jerome Davis, Jr., Tierra Samantha Catrina House, and Shanell Collette Brewer pleaded guilty. Gordon Lamarr Moore was convicted in April 2013 following a jury trial. He remains a fugitive.

These cases resulted from an investigation conducted by the Minnesota Financial Crimes Task Force, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigations. They were prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Karen B. Schommer and Assistant U.S. Attorney Michelle E. Jones.

The Financial Crimes Task Force was established pursuant to state law and is comprised of local, state, and federal law enforcement investigators dedicated to combating the growing problem of cross-jurisdictional financial crimes. The task force, overseen by an advisory board also created under state law, serves the entire District of Minnesota, presenting its cases to county or federal prosecutors, as appropriate.

The task force and the Minnesota U.S. Attorney's Office want to remind people to protect themselves from identity theft. For more information, visit <http://www.stopfraud.gov/protect-identity.html>

For more information on how to avoid becoming a victim of identity theft, visit <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/investigations/MailFraud/fraudschemes/mailtheft/IdentityTheft.aspx> . The IRS-Criminal Investigations also urges citizens to review the Taxpayer Guide to Identity Theft, which can be found at <http://www.irs.gov>

For tips on how to prevent mail theft, visit <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/investigations/MailFraud/fraudschemes/mailtheft/MailTheft.aspx>

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