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CHICAGO WOMAN ALLEGEDLY ILLEGALLY OBTAINED MORE THAN \$425,000 IN FALSE IRS TAX REFUNDS AND SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS

CHICAGO — A Chicago woman is scheduled to have a federal detention hearing tomorrow after she was arrested this week on charges alleging she misused other individuals' identities to illegally obtain more than \$400,000 in bogus IRS tax refunds and also used a stolen identity to fraudulently collect more than \$25,000 in Social Security benefits. Between 2005 and 2008, the defendant, **Zorana Theresa Charleston-Black**, allegedly filed 293 federal income tax returns, claiming more than \$1.3 million in refunds, with the IRS issuing refunds totaling \$403,697. At least 200 of these returns included false information in either a Schedule C or Form W-2, such as false wages and income tax withholding and false business income and expenses, and claimed a refund to which the listed taxpayer was not entitled, the charges allege.

Charleston-Black, 35, also known as "T," was arrested on Tuesday and was ordered to remain in federal custody pending a detention hearing at 1 p.m. tomorrow before U.S. District Judge Virginia Kendall. A federal grand jury returned a 22-count indictment on Jan. 11, charging her with 20 counts of filing false claims against the United States, and one count each of theft of government funds and aggravated identity theft. The indictment also seeks forfeiture of at least \$26,246, representing alleged proceeds of the Social Security fraud.

The charges were announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, and Alvin Patton, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division in Chicago. The Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General also participated in the investigation. The case is part of IRS and Justice Department effort announced last month to crack down on suspected identity theft and tax refund fraud.

According to the indictment, Individuals A through R were 20 actual persons residing in Illinois. In 2007 and 2008, Charleston-Black allegedly misused their identities and filed bogus tax returns in their names claiming fraudulent refunds in amounts ranging from \$2,454 to \$12,389. In 2008, she allegedly used the stolen identity of an individual, including the person's name, date of birth and social security number, to fraudulently obtain \$26,246 in Social Security Retirement and Survivors Insurance Benefits

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Bolling Haxall.

Each count of filing a false claim carries a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison; theft of government funds carries a maximum prison term of 10 years, and aggravated identity theft carries a mandatory prison term of two years in prison, which must be served consecutively to any sentence imposed for other crimes. In addition, each count carries a maximum fine of \$250,000 fine. If convicted, the Court must impose a reasonable sentence under federal statutes and the advisory United States Sentencing Guidelines.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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