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Two Sent to Prison in Stolen Identity Tax Refund Fraud Scheme

HOUSTON – Linus Davar Riggs, 32, and Nowell Joshua Cousin, 31, both of Houston, have been handed their sentences as a result of filing fraudulent tax returns using identification information that was either stolen or used without lawful authority, announced U.S. Attorney Kenneth Magidson. Riggs and Cousin pleaded guilty on March 17 and March 10, 2014, respectively, to conspiracy to commit mail fraud and conspiracy to submit false claims to the U.S. Cousin was also convicted of being a felon in possession of a firearm.

Today, U.S. District Judge Kenneth Hoyt, who accepted the pleas, handed Riggs a total sentence of 57 months in federal prison to be followed by three years of supervised release. Cousin was sentenced Sept. 2, 2014, to 70 months in federal prison, also to be followed by a three-year-term of supervised release. Both were further ordered to pay \$544,846 in restitution.

According to court records, the defendants used personal identifying information, including names and Social Security numbers, to file at least 266 fraudulent tax returns claiming approximately \$1,296,710 in refunds. According to Internal Revenue Service (IRS) records, the government paid out approximately \$544,846 before Riggs and Cousin were arrested and the scheme discovered. The tax refunds generated by the fraudulent returns were often deposited onto reloadable debit cards and mailed to addresses under control of the conspirators.

Both will remain in custody pending transfer to a U.S. Bureau of Prisons facility to be determined in the near future.

The matter was investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and IRS-Criminal Investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney James R. Buchanan is prosecuting.

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