

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024031489302 Tampa, FL – U.S. District Judge James S. Moody, Jr. has sentenced Howayda Hamdan to seven years and six months in federal prison for engaging in a conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. As part of her sentence, the court also entered a money judgment in the amount of \$1,168,858.11, the proceeds of the conspiracy. Hamdan pleaded guilty on August 21, 2014. According to court documents, from January 2011 to April 20, 2011, while working as a personal banker for Regions Bank, Hamdan opened 292 bank accounts using 146 stolen identities. These accounts were opened for the sole purpose of laundering fraudulently obtained federal income tax refund checks that were acquired using the stolen identities of another 219 unknowing victims. Hamdan's co-conspirators, Riad Sulaiman, Nedal Ahmad, and Khaldoun Khalil Khawaja, owned and operated businesses where they knowingly negotiated fraudulently obtained tax refund checks. The co-conspirators brought the fraudulently obtained Treasury checks to Hamdan so they could be deposited and the proceeds withdrawn. Many of these checks were issued in the names of deceased individuals. Hamdan needed means of identification, including names and Social Security numbers, to open the accounts at Regions Bank. Co-conspirator Dana Brown, a police officer, provided printouts from DAVID, Florida's driver's license database. The printouts contained the personally identifiable information (PII) required to open the bogus bank accounts. Since the victims of the tax filing scheme were often deceased, lived outside Florida, and/or were unknown to Hamdan and her co-conspirators, the stolen identities used to open the bank accounts were different, although similar in name, than the stolen identities used by the tax filers to obtain the tax refunds. Once Hamdan deposited the fraudulently obtained Treasury checks, she facilitated the distribution of the proceeds to her co-conspirators, including her husband, Hicham El Faoutih. In May 2011, agents searched Hamdan's residence. Among other things, they recovered \$81,460.00 in cash (still inside a Regions Bank bag and wrapped with bank wrappers); three fraudulently obtained Treasury checks; a ledger containing hundreds of names and Social Security numbers; and stolen identities that had been provided by Brown. In total, Hamdan facilitated the deposit or receipt of \$1,168,858.11 in fraudulently obtained tax refunds. The government has also identified more than 400 victims whose identities were stolen during the course of Hamdan's activities. The co-conspirators in this case were previously prosecuted and sentenced. In July 2014, Hicham El Faoutih was sentenced to 15 months in federal prison. Nedal Ahmad was sentenced to 51 months in federal prison in June 2013. In June 2012, Ocala Police officer Dana Brown was sentenced to six years and five months in federal prison. In December 2011, Riad Sulaiman was sentenced in the Southern District of Florida to 41 months in federal prison. In August 2013, Khaldoun Khalil Khawaja was sentenced in the Western District of Virginia to 70 months in federal prison; this sentence is being served concurrent to a 37-month sentence imposed in April 2012 in the Middle District of Florida case. This case was investigated by the United States Secret Service, the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Pasco County Sheriff's Office. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Mandy Riedel.