

ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL LISA MADIGAN

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MADIGAN: CRIMINAL FRAUD CHARGES FILED AGAINST TAX PREPARERS

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced the indictment of two tax preparers for allegedly filing fraudulent tax returns and defrauding the state out of more than \$400,000.

Gerrie Cokenour, 42, of Joliet and Nycole Simms-Stevens, 43, of Joliet were charged with two felony counts, including (1) theft of government property over \$100,000, a Class X felony punishable by up to six to 30 non-probational years in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC); and (2) entering false information on hundreds of Illinois income tax returns, a Class 4 felony punishable by up to one to three years in the IDOC.

Cokenour and Simms-Stevens worked for Tax Advocators, Inc., a Joliet tax preparation business owned by Cokenour. Over the course of several years, Cokenour and Simms-Stevens allegedly prepared 764 fraudulent state income tax returns. Tax returns allegedly contained inflated and fraudulent property tax data and other fraudulent deductions, which cost the state more than \$400,000.

“The defendants used their positions as tax preparation ‘experts’ to line their own pockets,” said Madigan. “They will be held accountable for their illegal scheme.”

The case was initiated after the Attorney General’s Consumer Fraud Bureau received complaints from consumers related to undisclosed tax preparation fees and stolen income tax refunds. The investigation was conducted by the Illinois Department of Revenue’s Criminal Investigations Division with assistance from the Joliet Police Department and the Will County State’s Attorney’s Office.

“Allegations of tax preparer fraud should serve as a reminder to the public to choose carefully when hiring a tax professional, and avoid claims of large refunds that seem too good to be true,” said Connie Beard, Director of Revenue. “I commend the job performed by the Department of Revenue’s Criminal Investigations Unit, as well as the work currently being done by the Attorney General’s office regarding this matter.”

The court set the bond for each defendant at \$1 million. The next court date is Feb. 18.

Assistant Attorney Anshuman Vaidya is handling the cases for Madigan’s Special Prosecutions Bureau.

The public is reminded that the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.