The Virgin Islands Consortium

Ten V.I. Women In Tax Fraud, Identity Theft Case Facing 12 Years In Prison On 119-Count Indictment

Crime / **Published On October 04, 2016 09:44 PM /**

Staff October 04, 2016

ST. CROIX -- The last of 10 Virgin Islands women indicted by a federal grand jury on tax-related charges made her initial appearance Monday before U.S. Magistrate Judge George W. Cannon on St. Croix, United States Attorney Ronald W. Sharpe announced. The remaining nine women made their initial appearances last week, and all of them were released pending trial.

On September 15, 2016, a federal grand jury returned a 119-count indictment against the women, charging them with conspiracy to defraud the United States, theft of government property and aggravated identity theft. The women were identified in the indictment as Joanne V. Benjamin, 36; Sylvia P. Benjamin, 36; Lynell Hughes, 33; Thema Liverpool, 28; Jacinta A. Gussie, 54; Indica Greenidge, 25; Nisha Brathwaite, 35; Darleen Thompson, 34; Nicolette Alexander, 25; and Sheba Rashida Young, 40.

Seven of the women: Sylvia Benjamin, Brathwaite, Gussie, Hughes, Liverpool, Young and Joanne Benjamin made their initial appearances before Judge Cannon on St. Croix. Greenidge and Alexander made their initial appearances before U.S. Magistrate Judge Patrick Hunt in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; and Thompson made her initial appearance before U.S. Magistrate Judge Gregory J. Kelly in Orlando, Florida.

The 119-count indictment is the result of years of investigative work by the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigations, which conducted a probe into a massive stolen identity/tax refund fraud scheme, United States Attorney Sharpe said. According to the indictment, the scheme involved the filing of numerous false income tax returns, the use of stolen identifications and the designation of illegal refunds to the women's bank accounts. The scheme resulted in the payment of illegal income tax refunds totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars, according to the indictment.

If convicted, the women face maximum sentences of 10 years in prison and a $250,000.00 fine for the conspiracy and theft of government property offenses. Additionally, they face a mandatory sentence of two years' imprisonment if convicted of aggravated identity theft.

United States Attorney Sharpe reminds the public that an indictment is merely a formal charging document and is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

The case was investigated by the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigations, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Alphonso Andrews, Jr.

Correction: Tuesday, November 4

The persons to which this correction was addressed wish to have their names withheld from this article.