

Sixth and Seventh St. Croix Women Plead Guilty in Multi-Defendant Tax Fraud Scheme

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ST. CROIX — United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced today that Nisha Brathwaite, age 38, and Darlene Thompson, age 37, both from the Virgin Islands and living on the mainland United States pleaded guilty on January 21, 2020 and January 24, 2020, respectively, to conspiracy to defraud the United States.

According to the plea agreement filed with the court, from January 2011 to July 2012, Brathwaite, Thompson and others participated in a scheme to steal money from the United States Treasury by fraudulently obtaining federal income tax refunds. The scheme involved the acquisition of personal identifying information used to electronically file falsified tax returns for tax years 2010 and 2011.

According to court documents, Brathwaite, Thompson and eight co- conspirators filed tax returns in individuals' true names and actual social security numbers and dates of birth but falsified the individuals' income earned, tax withholding amounts, credits, and other information, and thereby claimed refunds to which they were not entitled. They designated bank accounts for receipt of the refunds, which, once received, they then withdrew and spent for personal use. As a result of the scheme, \$35,555 was designated to Brathwaite's bank account, of which \$29,009 was actually deposited therein; further, \$54,460 was designated to Thompson's account of which \$38,881 was actually deposited therein.

Of ten defendants charged in the tax fraud scheme, Brathwaite and Thompson are the sixth and seventh to plead guilty. Five others have entered guilty pleas one of whom has been sentenced. Sentencing dates for Brathwaite and Thompson have been set for May 21, 2020 and May 12, 2020 respectively. The remaining three defendants are pending a new trial date. Brathwaite and Thompson each face a maximum sentence of ten years and a \$250,000 fine.

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