

Dear Friends,

There are more than two months until the deadline to file your taxes, but a recent trend has revealed a new reason to file your returns early. A growing practice of scam artists stealing individuals' identities to claim tax refunds has been on the rise, with the IRS identifying 262,000 returns seeking fraudulent refunds in 2011 alone—more than quadruple the number in the previous year.

That's why I've called on the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Justice to speed up their policing and prosecution of such scams. This year, too many Long Island families will learn about tax identity theft after it's too late.

Here are some tips that you can follow to keep yourself safe:

- **BE AWARE:** The IRS does not initiate contact with taxpayers by any type of electronic communication to request personal or financial information. The IRS does not send emails, text messages or social media messages stating you are being electronically audited or that you are getting a refund. If you get a message from the IRS through one of these channels,

**IT IS A SCAM**

. Do

**NOT**

respond.

- **BE PROACTIVE:** If you receive a scam email or electronic message claiming to be from the IRS, forward it to the IRS at [phishing@irs.gov](mailto:phishing@irs.gov) so that they may keep it on file and investigate if necessary.

- **ACT QUICKLY:** If you receive a letter from the IRS indicating that more than one tax return was filed for you or that you received wages from an employer you don't know – you may be a victim of identity theft. If you receive such a letter from the IRS, contact the IRS immediately – the earlier the thief is caught, the easier it is to clean up! You should also place a fraud alert on your credit reports at the three major credit bureaus, as well as file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at [www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov](http://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov) . The FTC also has a toll-free Identity Theft hotline: 1-877-IDTHEFT (438-4338).

- **PROTECT YOURSELF:** If you are filing electronically, make sure to use a strong password, and when you are finished, save the file to a CD or flash drive and then delete the personal return information from your hard drive. If working with an accountant, make sure you ask how they plan to protect your information.

- **REPORT IT:** If you are a victim of identity theft and have information about the thief that impacted your personal information, file an online complaint with the Internet Crime Complaint Center ( [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov) ). The IC3 is a system that alerts all relevant authorities of suspected criminal or civil violations to ensure the thief is caught, investigated, and punished accordingly.

- Most Importantly: **FILE EARLY!** The earlier you file your taxes, the less likely you are to be a victim of tax return identity theft. By waiting until the last minute, thieves could have weeks or months to get away with identity theft before you are even aware of it.

You can check out more tips on my website [here](#). And for more information and to check out other ways to keep yourself safe from identity theft, please visit my website at <http://israel.house.gov>.

Sincerely,

Steve Israel  
Member of Congress