

Cases of Scam Artists Stealing Identities to Claim Tax Refunds Have More Than Quadrupled between 2010 and 2011

HAUPPAUGE, NY— Today, Congressman Steve Israel (D-Huntington) joined with victims of tax identity theft to call on the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and Department of Justice to speed up prosecutions of this growing scam. This type of theft has become a mounting problem with almost 262,000 fraudulent returns removed from processing in 2011, amounting to \$1.5 billion in refunds.

"This year, far too many Long Island families will hear of tax identity theft for the first time when they learn they are victims of this new scam," Rep. Israel said. "Stealing someone's personal information to file phony returns sounds outrageous, but it's on the rise. Today I'm calling for better policing and more prosecution for those who commit such crimes. I'm also encouraging people to take every step possible to avoid becoming a victim."

Rep. Israel was joined by Christopher Madonna of Smithtown, a victim of tax refund identity theft who, upon filing his 2010 tax return, was informed by the IRS that there were two returns submitted under his social security number. Mr. Madonna was able to recoup the money he was owed by the government after Rep. Israel and the IRS's Tax Payer Advocate office intervened.

"I want to thank Congressman Israel for helping me recover my tax refund after finding out that someone stole my identity and filed a claim under my name," said Mr. Madonna. "As a victim of tax-refund identity theft, I can tell you first hand that this is a serious issue that is getting worse every year. I applaud Congressman Israel for taking action to educate taxpayers about these thefts and stop them from occurring in the first place."

Rep. Israel also asked that taxpayers take advantage of resources designed to educate them on how to protect their tax returns and their identity. These resources are provided by the IRS and FTC and are also posted on the Congressman's website. They include being aware that the IRS will never initiate contact with taxpayers to request any type of personal information, being proactive and reporting to the IRS if you believe you are a victim and using a strong password if you file electronically.

According to the IRS, identity thieves use a taxpayer's identity to fraudulently file a tax return and claim a refund. Legitimate taxpayers find out that something is wrong when they go to file their return only to discover that a return has already been filed using the same social security number. In 2010, the IRS was able to identify and remove almost 49,000 returns seeking fraudulent refunds. In 2011, this number rose to 262,000. IRS officials suggest filing tax returns as early as possible to make it harder for a thief to steal your identity and file a tax return.

Tips on how to protect yourself from tax identity theft can be found [here](#).