



April 27, 2012

**MADIGAN: SIX CHARGED IN ID THEFT 'SKIMMING' SCHEME AT WRIGLEY
FIELD, CHICAGO RESTAURANTS**

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced criminal charges against six defendants alleging they illegally obtained personal banking information from patrons dining and visiting Chicago area restaurants and attractions, including Wrigley Field and Magnificent Mile's RL Restaurant.

Defendants Joseph Woods, Alex Houston, Jenette Farrar, Essence S. Houston and Kenyetta Davis were arraigned earlier today in Cook County Circuit Court for "skimming" personal banking information to make purchases of more than \$200,000 from victims' banking and credit card accounts. A sixth defendant, Britain E. Woods, will be arraigned in the scheme during a hearing on Monday.

"Rogue employees conduct 'skimming' operations by stealing customers' credit, debit and ATM card information," Madigan said. "That's why it's important that consumers check their credit card bill and monthly banking statements for unauthorized charges and report them to their bank before more damage can be done."

Madigan alleged Joseph Woods, 32, of Chicago, organized the scheme by paying employees to skim credit card information of paying customers using a small credit card reader provided to them by Woods. The employees allegedly swiped customers' cards through the readers, enabling Woods to reproduce counterfeit credit cards to rack up thousands of dollars in charges.

Britain Woods, 33, Essence Houston, 28, Farrar, 34, and Davis, 31, all of Chicago, at various times were employed by the establishments used in the scheme, including Wrigley Field, RL Restaurant and Taco Bell and McDonald's Restaurants. Madigan said Alex Houston, 22, is charged for allegedly using the counterfeit cards to make illegal purchases with Joseph Woods.

The defendants were each charged with conspiracy to commit a financial crime, a Class 1 felony punishable by four to 15 years in prison. Joseph Woods, Essence Houston, Alex Houston and Davis were also charged with continuing a financial crimes enterprise, a Class 1 felony. Joseph Woods faces one additional count of Class 1 identity theft, and Alex Houston and Davis face an additional Class 2 identity theft charge, punishable by three to seven years in prison.

Madigan said financial institutions with accounts that were compromised in the scheme include Chase, U.S. Bank, Citibank, Harris Bank, American Express, Bank of America and Fifth Third Bank. The banks assisted in the investigations and are notifying potential victims.

The cases were investigated by the U.S. Secret Service and referred to Madigan's office for prosecution. Assistant Attorneys General Anshuman Vaidya and Robin Murphy are handling the cases for Madigan's Financial Crimes Bureau.

Madigan said identity theft is a significant threat to Illinois consumers. Last year, more than 3,200 identity theft complaints were filed with her office's Consumer Fraud Bureau. Consumers reported incidents of fraudulent charges on their existing accounts, thieves opening new accounts in their names (including credit card, utility and cell phone accounts) and instances of bank fraud, such as stolen checks or fraudulent withdrawals made to a victim's bank account.

Madigan urged consumers to contact her **Identity Theft Hotline, (866) 999-5630 or TTY (877) 844-5461**, for one-on-one assistance to report suspected incidents of identity theft to local law enforcement and financial institutions and for help repairing their credit and for protecting their identities.

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

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