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MADIGAN: CHICAGO MAN SENTENCED IN ID THEFT 'SKIMMING' SCHEME AT WRIGLEY FIELD, CHICAGO RESTAURANTS

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced a Chicago man pled guilty and was sentenced today for organizing a criminal scheme that illegally obtained personal banking information from patrons dining and visiting Chicago area restaurants and attractions, including Wrigley Field and the Magnificent Mile's RL Restaurant.

Defendant Joseph Woods, 32, pled guilty earlier today to felony conspiracy to commit a financial crime before Cook County Circuit Court Judge Diane Cannon. He was sentenced to five years in the Illinois Department of Corrections.

Woods was the organizer of an identity theft and bank fraud scheme whose accomplices "skimmed" information from customer credit cards at numerous restaurants in Chicago, including RL, Taco Bell, McDonald's, and a food vendor operating at Wrigley Field. The investigation into Woods' scheme uncovered that more than \$200,000 was stolen using patrons' bank and credit cards.

"Skimming" operations are a growing threat to consumers, who usually aren't aware they've been victimized in such a scheme," Madigan said. "That's why this case serves as a good reminder to check credit card bills and financial statements regularly for unauthorized charges. Consumers should quickly report any suspect charges to their bank before more damage can be done."

Woods organized the scheme by paying employees of the restaurants and eateries to skim customer credit card information using a small credit card reader provided to them by Woods. The employees allegedly swiped customers' cards through the readers, enabling Woods to steal their account information and produce counterfeit credit cards to make fraudulent purchases.

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 notified potential victims.

Additional defendants charged in the scheme have cases pending before Judge Cannon. 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 from 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 assistance in repairing their credit.

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

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