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### MADIGAN: SEVEN SENTENCED FOR ID THEFT SCHEME AT WRIGLEY FIELD, CHICAGO RESTAURANTS

**Chicago** — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced sentences against seven defendants who illegally obtained personal banking information from patrons visiting Chicago area restaurants and attractions, including Wrigley Field and the Magnificent Mile's RL Restaurant.

Defendants Joseph Woods, Britain E. Woods, Alex Houston, Jenette Farrar, Essence S. Houston, Kenyetta Davis and William Washington pled guilty and were sentenced for "skimming" personal banking information, which was used to make purchases of more than \$200,000. The banking and credit card account information was stolen from customers who patronized Chicago area establishments, including Wrigley Field, RL Restaurant, a Chicago Taco Bell location and a McDonald's restaurant in Berwyn.

Joseph Woods organized the scheme by paying the defendants, who were employees at the various establishments, to skim credit card information of paying customers using a small credit card reader provided to them by Woods and Washington. The employees swiped approximately 175 cards through the readers, enabling Woods to reproduce counterfeit credit cards and allowing Woods, Washington and Alex Houston to rack up thousands of dollars in charges.

"This case shows how prevalent identity theft is in everyday transactions," Madigan said. "It should serve as a reminder to regularly check your credit card bills and financial statements for any unauthorized charges or debits, and report any suspicious activity before any significant damage can be done."

The Attorney General said the seven defendants, all of Chicago, pled guilty and were sentenced in Cook County Criminal Court:

- Joseph Woods, 33, pled guilty to Continuing a Financial Crimes Enterprise, a Class 1 felony, and was sentenced to five years in prison;
- William Washington, 31, pled guilty to Continuing a Financial Crimes Enterprise, a Class 1 felony, and was sentenced to six years in prison;
- Alex Houston, 23, pled guilty to Financial Institution Fraud, a Class 3 felony, and was sentenced to three years in prison;
- Britain Woods, 34, pled guilty to Financial Institution Fraud, a Class 3 felony, and served two and a half months in jail;
- Farrar, 35, pled guilty to Financial Institution Fraud, a Class 3 felony, and was sentenced to two years of felony probation; and
- Essence Houston, 29, pled guilty to Financial Institution Fraud, a Class 3 felony, and was sentenced to two years felony probation; and
- Kenyetta Davis, 33, pled guilty to Identity Theft, a Class 2 felony, and was sentenced to two years felony probation.

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 investigation and notified victims to secure their personal information.

Madigan said identity theft is a significant threat to Illinois consumers. Last year, more than 2,500 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 protecting their personal information.

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

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