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MADIGAN: JOLIET TAX PREPARER PLEADS GUILTY TO TAX FRAUD

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced that a Joliet tax preparer pled guilty to charges of filing fraudulent tax returns and defrauding the state out of more than \$400,000.

Gerrie Cokenour, 42, of Joliet, pleaded guilty to laundering money derived from a felony tax preparation fraud scheme and was sentenced to 42 months in the Illinois Department of Corrections. The sentence will run concurrent to the 18-month federal prison sentence Cokenour is currently serving after pleading guilty to federal tax fraud charges.

In February, Madigan's office charged Cokenour and Nycole Simms-Stevens, 43, also of Joliet, with theft of government property over \$100,000 and entering false information on hundreds of Illinois income tax returns. Simms-Stevens' case is currently pending.

Cokenour and Simms-Stevens worked for Tax Advocators Inc., a Joliet tax preparation business owned by Cokenour. Between 2012 and 2015, Cokenour and Simms-Stevens allegedly prepared 764 fraudulent state income tax returns. Tax returns allegedly contained inflated and fraudulent property tax data and other fraudulent deductions, which cost the state more than \$400,000.

"The defendant stole hundreds of thousands of dollars from the state for her own benefit," Madigan said.

The case was initiated after Madigan's Consumer Fraud Bureau received complaints from consumers related to undisclosed tax preparation fees and stolen income tax refunds. The investigation was conducted by the Illinois Department of Revenue's (IDOR) Criminal Investigations Division with assistance from the Joliet Police Department and the Will County State's Attorney's Office.

"I applaud the Attorney General's office for a successful prosecution in this case and for the ongoing work of Revenue's Criminal Investigations Divisions to stop tax fraud," said Connie Beard, IDOR Director. "This guilty plea should send a clear message that attempts to steal the public's money by filing fraudulently-prepared tax returns will not be tolerated."

Unit Supervisor Anshuman Vaidya and Assistant Attorney General Albert Berry III are handling the cases for Madigan's Special Prosecutions Bureau.

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