

News Release

CONTACT Ryan Brown
PHONE 651-556-6397
E-MAIL ryan.brown@state.mn.us

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Contact: Ryan Brown

ryan.brown@state.mn.us

St. Paul tax preparer charged with multiple crimes

ST. PAUL, Minn. – The Minnesota Department of Revenue announced that the Dakota County Attorney’s Office recently charged Melissa Marie Johnson, of St. Paul, with three tax-related felonies.

Ms. Johnson was charged with one felony count of knowingly preparing tax returns that were fraudulent or false, one count of identity theft, and one count of theft by swindle.

According to the complaint, the West St. Paul Police Department received calls from two individuals claiming that Ms. Johnson, a tax preparer working in West St. Paul in 2017, filed income tax returns without their knowledge and put the refund money onto prepaid American Express cards under her control. The West St. Paul police informed the department of the complaints in July 2017.

The department began auditing returns prepared by Ms. Johnson for tax year 2016 and found a pattern of alleged fraud, wherein Ms. Johnson filed returns in the names of unknowing victims, including some children, and put the refunds onto AmEx cards she controlled. According to the complaint, investigators located a number of the fraudulently issued AmEx cards during the execution of a search warrant in Ms. Johnson’s home. The complaint states that Ms. Johnson told police that she would make up names and Social Security numbers, or use the names and Social Security numbers of dependents from other returns, to get refunds and increase the incentive bonuses she received from the tax preparation company she worked for. Ms. Johnson admitted to filing fraudulent returns, tracking refunds, and withdrawing funds from the fraudulently obtained AmEx cards, according to the complaint.

Each tax-related felony charge carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, a \$10,000 fine, or both. The theft by swindle and identity theft charges carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, a \$20,000 fine, or both. Defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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Although the department does not certify tax preparers, state law requires tax professionals who prepare income tax returns to follow standards of ethics and conduct. The majority of tax professionals abide by these standards and provide honest service and sound advice to their clients. In the rare event that a tax professional does not comply with these standards, they may be subject to penalties or criminal prosecution and may be barred from representing clients before the department. Taxpayers can report unprofessional conduct by [contacting the department](#) at 651-296-3781.

More information on choosing a preparer is [available on our website](#) or by searching **Tax preparer** in the Search box.

Many of the department's criminal case referrals come from public tips. The Minnesota Department of Revenue has a 24-hour tip line for anyone who suspects that a person or business is violating Minnesota tax laws. Local callers may dial 651-297-5195 or call toll-free by dialing 1-800-657-3500. Tips can also be submitted to the department by email at tax.fraud@state.mn.us. Tipsters may choose to remain anonymous.

Get the latest news and updates from the Minnesota Department of Revenue by following the department on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) or by signing up for our [email subscription list](#).

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