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NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF LAW & PUBLIC SAFETY

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Six Jersey City Residents Indicted on Charges they Stole \$573,000 from State by Filing Bogus Homestead Rebate Applications

TRENTON – Attorney General Stuart Rabner and Criminal Justice Director Gregory A. Paw announced that six Jersey City residents, including five members of one family, have been indicted on charges they conspired to steal \$573,383 from the state by filing fraudulent applications for 745 Homestead Rebate checks.

According to Paw, all six of the defendants were indicted by a state grand jury on charges of first-degree conspiracy, first-degree money laundering and second-degree theft by deception. Paw identified the defendants as Paul Sarris, 50; Achilles “Butz” Amante, 55; his sister, Matilda Amante Ramos, 56; and his three sons, Aristides Amante, 27, Amorito “Angelo” A. Amante, 33, and Aloysius M. Amante, 31.

The indictment was returned on Feb. 5, but was sealed until today pending execution of arrest warrants. On Tuesday, state investigators from the Division of Criminal Justice -Major Financial Crimes Bureau arrested Matilda Amante Ramos, Aristides Amante and Angelo Amante in Jersey City. They were assisted by agents from the U.S. Social Security Administration and the Jersey City Police Department. On Wednesday, state investigators arrested Aloysius M. Amante in Somerville. The defendants were transported to Mercer County Jail, where they were being held in lieu of bail. Sarris and Butz Amante remain at large.

“The indictment alleges that these defendants were systematically stealing funds intended to assist property taxpayers in New Jersey,” said Attorney General Rabner. “As our state works to provide comprehensive property tax relief for New Jerseyans, we’ll continue to work with the Division of Taxation to investigate and prosecute those who try to defraud these programs.”

Matilda Amante Ramos ran a travel agency, while all of the other defendants operated their own financial service companies offering tax preparation services. Between August 2001 and September 2003, the six defendants allegedly filed 745 false Homestead Rebate applications with the State of New Jersey, including multiple applications for each of 15 residential and commercial addresses they rented in Jersey City.

The defendants allegedly filed the applications using names and Social Security numbers obtained from tax preparation clients, without permission of the clients. The defendants allegedly laundered the \$573,383 in stolen funds by depositing the rebate checks in various commercial bank accounts maintained for their businesses.

“This is the third time in three months we’ve announced criminal cases stemming from Division of Taxation audits in which defendants fraudulently obtained state tax refunds or homestead rebates,” said Director Paw. “We’re sending a loud and clear message that criminals who attempt to steal from the state and its taxpayers will be caught.”

“This indictment is an example of how we vigilantly work to enforce our tax laws and ensure that property taxpayers get the relief they need and are entitled to,” said Acting Taxation Division Director Maureen Adams. “This case along with recent tax fraud arrests and convictions are a visible sign to taxpayers that we are working hard on their behalf as they are filling out their returns this tax season.”

Attorney General Rabner credited the Jersey City Police Department with initiating the investigation after receiving a tip that numerous Homestead Rebate checks addressed to different names were sent to a Jersey City address rented by Sarris and Butz Amante. They referred the case to the New Jersey Division of Taxation - Office of Criminal Investigation, which conducted an audit that identified hundreds of fraudulent rebate applications linked to the defendants. The Division of Taxation brought the Division of Criminal Justice into the investigation.

The case was presented to the state grand jury by Deputy Attorney General Denise Grugan of the Division of Criminal Justice. The investigation was conducted by Auditors Kevin Curry and Debra Lewaine of the Division of Taxation - Office of Criminal Investigation.

The indictment is merely an accusation and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty. First-degree charges carry a maximum sentence of 20 years in state prison and a criminal fine of \$200,000, while second-degree charges carry a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison and a fine of \$150,000.

A copy of the indictment is available online linked to this release at www.njpublicsafety.com.

In the two other recent cases involving fraudulent state tax returns, state investigators on Dec. 19, 2006 arrested Rosa Victoria Rivera, 39, of Lyndhurst, her boyfriend, John Arturo Perez Silva, 38, and her son, Wilson Armondo Pinos Rivera, 21, on second-degree theft charges for allegedly stealing \$827,000 in fraudulent tax refunds; and on Jan. 18, Mack Barden, 58, of Paterson, pleaded guilty to second-degree theft by deception for fraudulently obtaining \$210,035 in state tax refund and Homestead Rebate checks.

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