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## TEN INDICTED FOR PRETEXTING IN “OPERATION DIALING FOR DOLLARS” Defendants Would Adopt Various Identities To Get Confidential Tax, Medical And Employment Info

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 6, 2007

Ten people were indicted by a federal grand jury in Seattle in connection with a scheme to illegally obtain confidential information on more than 12,000 citizens across the country. To obtain confidential tax, medical and employment information, workers at BNT Investigations in Belfair, Washington, would pose as another individual to get government agencies including the IRS, the Social Security Administration, and various state employment security offices to provide confidential information. The year-long investigation dubbed, “Operation Dialing for Dollars,” also revealed that some workers posed as representatives of doctors’ offices to get medical or pharmacy records.

“This indictment alleges that private investigators across the country illegally obtained confidential information and sold it to the clients who hired them,” said United States Attorney Jeffrey C. Sullivan. “This is a very serious matter, the investigation is continuing and it is our intention to go after these ‘clients’ if we can prove that they knew this information was obtained illegally.”

The ten defendants are charged with Conspiracy and Wire Fraud. Seven of the defendants are charged with Fraudulent Elicitation of Social Security Administration Information. Six of the defendants are charged with Solicitation of Federal Tax Information. All ten defendants are charged with Aggravated Identity Theft. The three Washington defendants are scheduled to appear in U.S. District Court in Tacoma at 2:30 today.

These are the defendants indicted by the grand jury:

EMILIO TORRELLA, 36, Belfair, Washington  
BRANDY N. TORRELLA, 27, Belfair, Washington  
STEVEN W. BERWICK, 22, Belfair, Washington  
VICTORIA J. TADE, 52, San Diego, California  
MEGAN OSOSKE, 40, Beaverton, Oregon  
DARCI P. TEMPLETON, 55, Houston, Texas  
ESAUN G. PINTO, Sr., 33, Brooklyn, New York  
PATRICK A. BOMBINO, 58, Brooklyn, New York  
ROBERT GRIEVE, 67, Houston, Texas  
ZIAD N. SAKHLEH, 26, Houston, Texas

The TORRELLAs own BNT Investigations in Belfair, Washington. BERWICK is a longtime employee of BNT and was the office manager. The other co-conspirators, private investigators across the country, gave the TORRELLAs the names, addresses, social security numbers and other personally identifying information of people they had been hired to investigate. The subjects of the investigation had not given permission for their personal information to be disseminated to the TORRELLAs. Using that information, the TORRELLAs and their employees would call various government agencies, financial institutions, pharmacies and hospitals, posing as other people, and asking for their personal records. From January 2004 to May 2007, the TORRELLAs and their employees obtained or attempted to obtain confidential information on more than 12,000 people nationwide.

The private investigators had been hired by attorneys, insurance companies and collection agencies to

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investigate the backgrounds of opposing parties, witnesses and benefit claimants, and to uncover assets or income. The TORRELLAs promoted their services to the private investigators.

The TORRELLAs and their employees used a variety of strategies to trick the government agencies to provide them information they wanted. With the IRS they would impersonate the taxpayer and ask for past tax returns, claiming that a bookkeeper was being investigated for embezzlement. On other occasions they would similarly claim to be the taxpayer, in the hospital awaiting surgery, and needing the tax returns to demonstrate to the hospital that they could pay for the services. In calls to various agencies and financial institutions the "pretexters" claimed various hardships such as being a battered spouse, facing bankruptcy, foreclosure or serious illness. In one case the pretexter tried to claim she needed the information because a child had been abducted. BRANDY TORRELLA called pharmacies and hospitals posing as someone from the subject's doctor's office, for the purpose of obtaining medical information. The TORRELLAs then forwarded all the information they obtained to the private investigators for fees ranging from \$30 to \$300 per record.

"Citizens have the right to expect that their private information will be kept private, especially when it's in the hands of the US Government," said Terry K. Peacock, Special Agent in Charge of the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration in Denver, Colorado. "Through the coordinated efforts of the United States Attorney's Office, TIGTA, SSA-OIG, and DOL-OIG, and other Washington State Agencies, we have taken a big step forward with these indictments in protecting the public and their personal information from individuals who would illegally obtain and misuse this information."

"This indictment successfully exposed the alleged theft and misuse of confidential information from various state and Federal record systems, including those relating to the Unemployment Insurance program," said Gordon Heddell, Inspector General, United States Department of Labor. "This joint investigation with our law enforcement partners demonstrates our commitment to bringing to justice those who commit identity theft and defraud the Department of Labor's programs for personal profit."

The charges contained in the indictment are only allegations. A person is presumed innocent unless and until he or she is proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Conspiracy is punishable by up to five years in prison. Wire Fraud is punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Fraudulent Elicitation of Social Security Administration Information and Solicitation of Federal Tax Information are punishable by up to five years in prison. Aggravated Identify Theft is punishable by a mandatory two year term on top of any sentence on the underlying offenses.

The case is being investigated by the Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General (SSA-OIG), the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), and the Washington State Employment Security Department Office of Special Investigations.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Katheryn Kim Frierson and Kurt Hermanns.

For additional information please contact Emily Langlie, Public Affairs Officer for the United States Attorney's Office, at (206) 553-4110.

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