



U.S. Department of Justice

United States Attorney Eastern District of Arkansas

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BATESVILLE WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO TAX FRAUD

Little Rock - United States Attorney Jane Duke and Christopher R. Pikelis, Special Agent in Charge for the Nashville Field Office of IRS Criminal Investigation announced that Melba Nelia Lopez, 31, of Batesville, Arkansas, has pled guilty to two counts of assisting in the preparation of fraudulent income tax returns. Lopez faces a maximum penalty of 6 years in prison and a fine of \$500,000 when she is sentenced later this year.

“Fraudulent conduct by income tax preparers is a serious problem. Consumers rely on the honest advice of the tax preparer to complete their tax returns legally. When that preparer purposely produces fraudulent income tax returns, the consumers, as well as the United States, are defrauded.” stated Duke.

Lopez, owner and operator of Melba’s Tax Office, a tax preparation business in Batesville, Arkansas, waived indictment and pled guilty to an Information filed just before the hearing. Lopez admitted that on February 14, 2005, she prepared a false 2004 income tax return for a client that contained materially false items, generating a larger refund than the client was entitled to receive by \$6,534.00. Additionally, Lopez admitted that in January 2006, she prepared a 2005 tax return for another client that resulted in an overpayment to that client of \$3,472.00. The returns were filed with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and each claimed five dependants.

As a result of her conduct, Lopez admitted that the tax loss to the government is approximately \$95,428.00.

“Violations of this nature will be aggressively investigated by the IRS,” said Christopher R. Pikelis, Special Agent in Charge for the Nashville Field Office of IRS Criminal Investigation. “Anyone who hires a tax preparer should seek out a reputable person with the proper credentials. Please avoid any preparer who promises to increase your refund for a fee or attempts to add false or inflated tax deductions to your return,” added Pikelis.

This investigation was conducted by IRS Criminal Investigation.

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