

Department of Justice

United States Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr.
Western District of New York

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CONTACT: BARBARA BURNS
PHONE: (716) 843-5817
FAX: (716) 551-3051

MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO IDENTITY THEFT

BUFFALO, N.Y.-- U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that J'Melle Hooks, 26, of Cocoa, Florida, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Richard J. Arcara, to access device fraud and aggravated identity theft. The charges carry a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison, a fine of \$250,000 or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Maura K. O'Donnell, who is handling the case, stated that the defendant was apprehended and searched at the Peace Bridge in September, 2011, while attempting to enter Canada. Hooks was found to be in possession of stolen healthcare records containing personal identifying information for hundreds of individuals. It was later discovered that tax returns were fraudulently filed using some of the identities listed in the medical records. Refunds issued by the Internal Revenue Service in connection with the tax returns were automatically put onto debit cards. The defendant had six of these debit cards with him when arrested. Hooks used the credit cards in multiple locations in the United States in Canada to make purchases and obtain cash.

The plea is the culmination of an investigation on the part of Special Agents of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge James C. Spero.

Sentencing is scheduled for Aug. 2, 2012 at 1:00 p.m., in Buffalo, N.Y., before Judge Arcara.

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