

**COUNTY OF SUFFOLK
DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE**



**THOMAS J. SPOTA
DISTRICT ATTORNEY**

APRIL 16, 2012

**SUFFOLK DA SPOTA ANNOUNCES INDICTMENT OF “SHAMELESS THIEF” WHO
STOLE THE IDENTITIES OF THE HELPLESS**

Suffolk County District Attorney Thomas Spota today announced the arrest and indictment of a 30 year old suspect who is alleged to have stolen the identities of 56 brain-injured people to file false tax returns to collect refunds from the states of New York and New Jersey and from the internal Revenue Service. Benjamin Achampong, 30, is charged in a 48-count indictment alleging grand larceny in the third degree, identity theft in the second degree, offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree and possession of a forged instrument in the second degree.

District Attorney Spota said Achampong, who he described as “a shameless, incorrigible thief and forger”, worked as a manager for the Long Island Head Injury Association, an agency that provides housing and services for people disabled by head trauma; either by stroke, disease, or as victims of an accident. In 2006 and 2007, Achampong used his position to foster a scheme in which he would access patient records and steal social security numbers and other data to file false tax returns “which he electronically filed not only with the state of New York but with the state of New Jersey and with the IRS. He received refund checks in amounts from \$200 to \$2,000”, DA Spota said.

“The financial information included in the phony returns - bearing a patient’s name and social security number - was entirely false, the district attorney explained. “Achampong would have a few refund checks sent to his residence, but more often he would have the tax refund electronically transferred to one of at least sixteen bank accounts he controlled. The investigation found that he used the identities of girlfriends, and even his brother, to open accounts in which to deposit the proceeds from his crimes”, DA Spota explained.

The investigation by the district attorney’s Tax Crime Unit, the Identity Theft Section of the Suffolk County Police Department and the New York State Tax Department found Achampong used the proceeds from his scheme to fund the purchase of a Range Rover and pay for not only his own personal expenses but the rent and expenses of a number of girlfriends.

“The defendant’s criminal record shows his Suffolk arrest is not the first time he’s preyed on families who are coping with tragic circumstances”, DA Spota observed.

Achampong was arrested in 2009 in Nassau County for identity theft and other charges for stealing the identity of a deceased developmentally disabled man who had received care at a group home Achampong worked at as a resident manager. Achampong pleaded guilty and received a jail sentence and probation for using the dead man's name and financial information to receive debit cards.

In November of last year Achampong was arrested by law enforcement in Georgia for using a fake credit card to purchase items from a BJ's store in Charleston County.

The investigation found while the credit card was in Achampong's name, the bar code contained another person's information. During the follow-up investigation, Georgia authorities discovered Achampong possessed 16 fake credit cards. He currently faces financial transaction fraud and forgery charges as well as identity theft crimes in Charleston County. Those victimized in the credit card scam are residents of Michigan, Colorado, Texas and Georgia.

"When Georgia law enforcement executed a search warrant in Achampong's home in Fulton County, the police found a credit card writing machine that enabled the defendant to enter information on the cards", said District Attorney Spota. While imprisoned in Fulton County, authorities there learned of Suffolk's County's warrant for his arrest and the defendant was extradited last week and arraigned Friday in county criminal court. The defendant pleaded not guilty at his arraignment before Judge Gary Weber who set cash bail at \$50,000 with a bond alternative of \$100,000. Achampong was represented at the arraignment by Michael Alber, an associate of the DerGarabedian & Dillon law firm.

New York State Commissioner of Taxation and Finance Thomas H. Mattox said of Achampong, "Identity theft is a very serious matter. It is even more troubling when it is alleged that the victim is a person with disabilities. We thank District Attorney Spota and his staff for the time and effort they dedicated to this investigation."

Suffolk law enforcement has also learned Achampong was running a shipping business in Delaware prior to his Georgia arrest. "He would purchase items such as cars, personal care supplies and other products to Ghana for re-sale", DA Spota said. "This scam involved Achampong use of fake identities to purchase paper and other goods from big box stores which he subsequently resold in Ghana at a 100% profit."

Achampong's arrest and indictment is the result of a fourteen-month investigation. During his employment at LIHIA in 2006 and 2007, the defendant lived in apartment complexes in Coram and Port Jefferson Station.