

This letter is in response to Ray McAllister's article (9/26/06) "**Rob a bank, you may do time; steal an identity, not so likely.**" While the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia - the office that would prosecute federal cases of identity theft - was not contacted for this story, we feel it necessary to respond.

Contrary to the suggestion of Mr. McAllister, identity theft is far from "the perfect job." Indeed, law enforcement agencies in this area are working together to attack identity theft. The author only mentions in passing the Metro Richmond Fraud and Identity Theft Task Force (Task Force), but failed to contact the Task Force before publishing his story. If he had, he would have learned that the Task Force is actively and aggressively investigating identity theft in the Metro-Richmond area.

The Task Force was formed in the Fall of 2004 and is made up of investigators from the United States Postal Inspection Service; the FBI; the Secret Service; the Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General (OIG); Housing and Urban Development OIG; the Richmond, Henrico County, and Chesterfield County Police Departments; the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia; and the Virginia Attorney General's Office. To prosecute these cases, this Office has an Assistant U.S. Attorney (AUSA) dedicated to the Task Force, and several other AUSAs regularly prosecute identity theft cases. The Virginia Attorney General's Office also has three prosecutors and the Chesterfield Commonwealth's Attorney has one prosecutor designated to prosecute identity thieves in federal court.

The primary focus of the Task Force has been the dismantling of organized groups committing identity theft in the Richmond area. In addition, the task force targets for federal prosecution those individuals who have a history of fraud-related offenses. Since its inception, the Task Force has investigated the complaints of more than 400 identity theft victims, with losses of more than 2 million dollars to financial institutions. These investigations have resulted in the prosecution of more than 90 defendants for identity theft-related offenses. Many of these defendants have been convicted federally of Aggravated Identity Theft, a new federal offense enacted in July of 2004 which mandates a two-year, consecutive prison term.

Cases are referred to the task force through the participating agencies, and directly from Richmond-area financial institutions. Investigators make every effort to associate smaller and isolated complaints with larger ongoing investigations. In short, Richmond-area law enforcement agencies are dedicated to combating identity theft and supporting crime victims. More information may be obtained at www.richmondIDtheft.com.

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