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Richmond Married Couple Plead Guilty to Fraud and Aggravated Identity Theft

RICHMOND, Va. – Kenneth O. Morris, 44, and Bernice R. Morris, 43, of Richmond, Va., pleaded guilty today to conspiracy to commit bank fraud and aggravated identity theft.

Neil H. MacBride, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; and Andrew E. Harris, Jr., Special Agent in Charge of the United States Secret Service Richmond Field Office, made the announcement after the pleas were accepted by United States Magistrate Judge M. Hannah Lauck.

Kenneth and Bernice Morris were charged in criminal informations on February 12, 2010 on charges of conspiracy to commit bank fraud and aggravated identity theft. Sentencing has been set for May 26, 2010, before Chief United States District Judge James R. Spencer. Kenneth and Bernice Morris each faces a maximum penalty of 30 years of imprisonment on the conspiracy to commit bank fraud charges, and a mandatory consecutive 2 years of imprisonment on the aggravated identity theft charges.

In documents filed with the plea agreements, the Morrises admitted to conspiring from January 2009 to December 2009, to engage in a scheme to defraud various financial institutions and to commit identity theft. As part of this scheme, Kenneth Morris stole wallets and bank and credit cards from office buildings across Virginia. With respect to some or all of the thefts, Bernice Morris called the theft victims and claimed to be a representative from the victim's financial institution who was checking on questionable transactions on the victim's account. Bernice Morris obtained many victims' personal identification numbers by this form of deceit. Bernice Morris would relay the victims' personal identification numbers to her husband, Kenneth Morris, who would, in turn, use the victims' bank cards, including their account and personal identification numbers, to make cash withdrawals from their bank accounts and to obtain other things of value. Kenneth Morris and Bernice Morris shared the proceeds from the fraudulent scheme.

The case was investigated by the United States Secret Service as a member of the Metro-Richmond Identity Theft Task Force, with assistance from the Chesterfield County Police Department, Henrico County Police Department, Richmond City Police Department, Newport News City Police Department, Fredericksburg Police Department, and Fairfax County Police

Department. Other member agencies of the Task Force include: the United States Postal Inspection Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, Richmond Police Department, and Henrico County Division of Police. Prosecutions for the Task Force are handled by the United States Attorney's Office and the Office of the Attorney General for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Assistant United States Attorneys Benjamin L. Hatch and Michael R. Gill are prosecuting the case on behalf of the United States. For more information on the Task Force, including assistance for victims of identity theft, visit: www.richmondIDtheft.com.

A copy of this press release may be found on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/vae>. Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia at <http://www.vaed.uscourts.gov> or on <http://pacer.uspci.uscourts.gov>.

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