



Department of Justice

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WAYNE P. LAWLESS PLEADS GUILTY TO EXTORTION RELATED TO HURRICANE DISASTER RELIEF PROGRAM

BATON ROUGE, LA – United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced that WAYNE P. LAWLESS, age 50, of Donaldsonville, Louisiana, pled guilty today before U.S. District Court Judge Frank J. Polozola to a bill of information charging LAWLESS with extortion under color of official right.

The bill of information alleges that LAWLESS, at all times relevant, was working as an employee of IIF Data Solutions, Inc., a company contracted by the Louisiana National Guard to service the needs of the Guard, Reserve, and active duty personnel, and to screen people applying with the Louisiana Department of Labor (LDOL) for financial assistance for potential recruits to the National Guard. In this capacity, LAWLESS was assigned to assist people who came into the LDOL office in Baton Rouge seeking employment and unemployment assistance. According to the bill of information, LAWLESS allegedly facilitated numerous fraudulent claims for Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) benefits, which are intended to provide financial assistance to individuals whose employment has been lost or interrupted as a result of a major disaster declared by the President of the United States. The bill of information alleges that LAWLESS unlawfully obtained money not due him from people whose false and fraudulent DUA claims were presented. This money was obtained with the person's consent, which was induced under color of official right.

The Louisiana Department of Labor administers the DUA program for the State of Louisiana, the funding for which comes from federal funds provided by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA).

As a result of this guilty plea to the bill of information, LAWLESS faces a maximum sentence of twenty (20) years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both.

In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force – chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division – includes members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the Postal Inspector's Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others. This case was investigated by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; the Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General; the U.S. Postal Inspection Service; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Louisiana State Police; and the Zachary, Louisiana, Police Department. Deputy Criminal Chief Ian F. Hipwell prosecuted the case.

The total number of defendants who have been charged in the Middle District of Louisiana with violations related to Hurricane Katrina relief funds stands at sixty-one.

For further information, contact David R. Dugas, U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Louisiana, or Lyman Thornton, First Assistant U.S. Attorney, at (225) 389-0443.

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