

Image Not
Available

U.S. Department of Justice

Karin J. Immergut

United States Attorney

District of Oregon

1000 SW Third Avenue, Ste. 600 (503) 727-1000

Portland, OR 97204-2902 Fax: (503) 727-1117

1/26/06 - PRESS RELEASE

**Six Portland Residents Charged with Fraud and Receipt of
Stolen FEMA Hurricane Katrina Disaster Relief Funds**

PORTLAND, OREGON - Karin J. Immergut, the United States Attorney for the District of Oregon, announced today that six Portland residents have been charged in connection with the fraudulent receipt of Hurricane Katrina disaster relief funds. The indictments were returned by a federal grand jury in Portland on January 25, 2006.

Chantel Curry, 38; Dominique S. Andrew, 19; Virger M. Garland, 46; Jennifer M. Jones, 36; Trina M. Wilson, 37; and Steven D. Brown, 50; are all charged with one count of Receipt of Stolen Government Property, 18 U.S.C. § 641, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

The charges stem from a federal investigation by the Postal Inspection Service, the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General into allegations that Portland residents made false statements in order to qualify for Hurricane Katrina Expedited Assistance disaster relief payments in the amount of \$2,000 and Rental Assistance payments in the amount of \$2,358 by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In order to qualify for the funds, a person must have been displaced from his or her primary residence and be in need of shelter as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

Federal investigators have determined that checks were issued by FEMA payable to Portland residents named in these indictments based on false representations that the defendants were displaced by Hurricane Katrina. The indictments in these cases each allege that the defendant received a FEMA disaster assistance check knowing it was stolen. Each defendant is charged with one count of Receipt of Stolen Government Property. The indictment charging Jennifer Jones alleges that she received the proceeds via a wire transfer of funds rather than by check.

“Unlawfully profiting from the misfortune of others is appalling, and those who commit such crimes will be aggressively prosecuted,” stated U.S. Attorney Karin Immergut.

“These defendants are accused of abusing the system in the worst way, targeting money meant for the most vulnerable victims of Hurricane Katrina,” said FBI Special Agent in Charge Robert J. Jordan. “The FBI and our other partners in law enforcement are taking a tough stance on crimes like the ones charged in this indictment. Whether the offense involves a few thousand or a few hundred thousand dollars, the message is the same: don’t do it.”

“The Postal Inspection Service, along with our fellow partners in law enforcement, will aggressively pursue those individuals who perpetrate fraud schemes intended to divert much needed relief funds from the victims of Hurricane Katrina.” Said Joseph A. Pirone, Acting Inspector in Charge, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Seattle.

A criminal indictment is only an allegation and not evidence of guilt. Defendants are presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The defendants are scheduled to appear in federal court in Portland today at 1:30 PM for arraignment on the charges. Additional indictments and arrests are expected.

This prosecution is supported by the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force established by the United States Attorney General on September 8, 2005. Task Force members include the Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, the Federal Trade Commission, the Postal Inspection Service, the Securities & Exchange Commission, and other federal agencies. This national task force, working with state and local agencies, will swiftly bring to justice those who seek to commit fraud in connection with payment of hurricane relief funds.

Anyone who has information relating to fraudulent receipt of Hurricane Katrina Disaster Assistance funds is urged to report it at www.ic3.gov, or the Department of Justice Katrina Fraud Task Force and Federal Trade Commission Consumer Response Center at (877) 382-4357, or (877) 362-2502 for persons with speech or hearing impairment

For questions please contact Public Information Officer Diane Peterson at (503) 727-1066.