



Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of Texas

Donald J. DeGabrielle Jr. • United States Attorney

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE	ANGELA DODGE
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HOUSTON RESIDENT CHARGED FOR FALSE CLAIM FILED WITH FEMA FOR HURRICANE RELIEF

Indictment results in 61st person to be charged with Katrina Fraud in SDTX

(HOUSTON, Texas) – United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle announced the recent return of an indictment charging Carauda Marie Ratliff, 39, of Houston, Texas, with filing a false claim with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for Hurricane Katrina disaster relief.

This indictment brings to 61 the number of individuals charged in the Southern District of Texas with fraud relating to Hurricane Katrina and/or Hurricane Rita.

Ratliff is accused of filing a claim Sept. 15, 2005, for Hurricane Katrina disaster assistance, falsely claiming her primary residence was in New Orleans and that Katrina left her with essential needs for food, clothing and shelter. According to the indictment, in her claim, Ratliff provided an address in Houston, Texas, as her current mailing address and she requested disaster payments be sent to her via electronic funds transfer. Ratliff received a total of two separate electronic funds transfers to bank accounts controlled by her totaling \$16,711.96.

Ratliff was arrested by inspectors of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) today and is expected to appear before a U.S. Magistrate Judge later today. She has been charged with mail fraud and wire fraud. Both counts carry a statutory punishment range of up to 20 years imprisonment and not more than three years supervised release, upon conviction.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas is a member of the Department of Justice's Hurricane Katrina Task Force, created by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales to deter, detect and prosecute unscrupulous individuals who try to take advantage of the Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita disasters. Headed by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher, the Task Force is comprised of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies and the United States Attorney's Offices in the Gulf Coast region and nationwide.

This case was investigated by the USPIS and the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (DHS-OIG), and will be prosecuted by Special Assistant United States Attorney Tammie Y. Moore.

Anyone suspecting criminal activity involving disaster assistance programs can make an anonymous report by calling the toll-free Hurricane Relief Fraud Hotline, 1-866-720-5721, 24 hours a day, seven days a week until further notice. Information can also be emailed to the Inspector General at dhsorghotline@dhs.gov or sent by surface mail, with as many details as possible to: Department of Homeland Security, Attn: Office of Inspector General, Hotline, Washington, D.C. 20258.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.

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