



Department of Justice

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Middle District of Louisiana

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ARREST FOR FRAUD IN OBTAINING DISASTER UNEMPLOYMENT DEBIT CARDS

BATON ROUGE, LA – United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced that WAYNE P. LAWLESS, age 50, of Donaldsonville, Louisiana, was arrested on May 3, 2006, and charged in a criminal complaint with mail fraud and false use of Social Security numbers to obtain disaster unemployment debit cards for alleged losses resulting from Hurricane Katrina.

The criminal complaint alleges that LAWLESS, while working in his capacity as an employee of the Louisiana Department of Labor, facilitated numerous fraudulent claims for Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) benefits. Based upon information obtained from the applications for these cards, the social security numbers on the applications did not match the legitimate names associated with the social security numbers.

The subject debit cards were issued by the Louisiana Department of Labor as Disaster Unemployment Assistance 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 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). This arrest brings to fifty the total number of defendants who have been charged in the Middle District of Louisiana with violations related to Hurricane Katrina relief funds.

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.

The case is being 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. Assistant U.S. Attorney Ian Hipwell is prosecuting the case.

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

NOTE: A complaint is merely an accusation by a law enforcement official, and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty at trial.

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