



**Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas**

Donald J. DeGabrielle, Jr. • United States Attorney

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**FOUR MORE HOUSTON RESIDENTS CHARGED WITH FILING FALSE CLAIMS
FOR FEMA HURRICANE RELIEF**

HOUSTON, TX – United States Attorney Donald J. DeGabrielle, Jr. today announced the recent return of four separate indictments charging Rashieda Hollins, 24, Zina Rogers, 42, Byron Smith, 59, and Jason Watson, 21, all of Houston, Texas, with filing false claims with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita disaster relief. The indictments were returned on Thursday, May 11, 2006.

Special agents of the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (DHS OIG) arrested Smith on May 15 and Rogers on May 16. Smith was released on a \$10,000 bond. Rogers is detained pending a hearing on Friday, May 26, before United States Magistrate Judge Mary Milloy.

Arrest warrants remain outstanding for Jason Watson and Rashieda Hollins. **Anyone with information concerning their whereabouts should contact the DHS OIG at 713-706-4600. Photos of defendants Watson and Hollins are attached.**

With the return of these indictments, twenty individuals in total have been charged in the Southern District of Texas with fraud relating to Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita now number twenty.

Hollins is accused of aiding and abetting the filing of three false claims for Hurricane Katrina disaster assistance. The indictment alleges that Hollins' first two claims on September 13, 2005, and her third claim on September 21, 2005, each falsely stated that her primary residence at the time of Hurricane Katrina was New Orleans, Louisiana, and that she had an essential need for food, clothing and shelter as a result of the storm.

The indictment against Rogers alleges that on September 11, 2005, she filed a claim for Hurricane Katrina disaster assistance that falsely stated that her primary residence was in New Orleans and that Katrina left her with essential needs for food, shelter, and clothing.

Smith is accused of submitting a false claim for Hurricane Rita disaster relief by falsely stating that his primary residence was in Port Arthur, Texas, that he suffered disaster related moving and storage expenses, and that he had an essential need for food, clothing and shelter as a result of Hurricane Rita.

The indictment against Watson alleges that his September 13, 2005, application for assistance falsely claimed that he resided in New Orleans, Louisiana, at the time of Hurricane Katrina and falsely claimed he had an essential need for food clothing and shelter as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Watson's indictment also accuses him of filing a false claim for disaster

relief on September 17, 2005, on behalf of Ebonee Lagard, who pleaded guilty last month to aiding and abetting the filing of that false claim with FEMA.

The false claim count carries a statutory punishment range of up to five years of imprisonment, without parole, and a fine of up to \$250,000, 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 Fraud 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 investigating agencies and the United States Attorney's Offices in the Gulf Coast region and nationwide.

These cases were investigated by the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General and the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, and is being prosecuted by Special Assistant United States Attorney Jason Varnado and Assistant United States Attorney Gregg Costa.

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 dhsoighotline@dhs.gov or sent by surface mail, with as many details as possible, to:

Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC. 20528
Attn: Office of Inspector General, Hotline

An indictment or superseding 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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