



Department of Justice

United States Attorney Alice H. Martin
Northern District of Alabama

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2006
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CONTACT: ALICE H. MARTIN
PH: 205-244-2001
FX: 205-244-2171

TWENTY-THREE INDICTED FOR FEMA FRAUD

BIRMINGHAM, AL - Today at a press conference U.S. Attorney Alice H. Martin, Carmen S. Adams Special Agent in charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Tony Robinson, Postal Inspector, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and Roy Sexton, Special Agent, United States Secret Service, announced twenty-three indictments charging twenty-three individuals with fraud against the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in connection with hurricane disaster relief. In response to Hurricane Katrina, FEMA made available to eligible households \$2,000 in expedited disaster assistance to be followed by additional funds if needed. The expedited disaster assistance was intended to help Katrina evacuees with immediate food, shelter and clothing needs. To be eligible for FEMA assistance based on housing needs, the damaged home in the disaster areas must be where the applicant usually lives and where the applicant was residing at the time of the disaster.

“Theft of disaster relief funds will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law,” says U.S. Attorney Martin. “I continue to ask the public to report illegal claims to law enforcement.”

Eighteen Alabama residents were charged with one count of making false claims against the government, one count of theft of government money or property, and one count of mail fraud for claiming to be a resident of an area affected by a hurricane when they were not. Each fraudulently received approximately \$2000 in relief funds. Those charged:

SHAROD LAMAR WILLIAMS, 26, of Jasper;

KENYA WILLIAMS JONES, 29, of Midfield;

LISA NICOLE WILLIAMS, 27, of Midfield;

THEODORE GREGORY, JR., 34, of Midfield;

DIANE WILLIAMS, 50, of Midfield;

CARLA DUNCAN, 33, of Bessemer;

DAVIDA BURROUGHS, 24, of Bessemer;

name withheld pending service of warrant, of Bessemer;

YOLANDA WITHERSPOON, 32, of Bessemer;

EVA MARIE JOSEPH, 40, of Bessemer;

LETRICE ZANTE POE, 25 of Birmingham;

SHANIKA ROPER, 27, of Bessemer;

SANDRA FORD JONES, 50 of Bessemer;

DANNY LEE JACKSON, 24, of Bessemer;

CURTOYIA KING-DUNCAN, 26, of Bessemer;

LEE JAMES PHILLIPS, 39, of Bessemer;

PAYTON BRUCE, 38, of Brighton;

EIMILY LATASHA WHITE, 21, of Birmingham;

Additionally:

REGINALD BROWN, 25, of Bessemer, Alabama, is charged with one count of making false claims against the government, and one count of mail fraud. BROWN claimed to be a resident of an area affected by a hurricane, the indictment alleges that BROWN was not a resident of an area affected by a hurricane and was not entitled to \$2,000 in relief funds.

TRISTAN JEFFERSON, 24, of Bessemer, Alabama, is charged with one count of theft of government money or property. The indictment alleges that JEFFERSON converted to his own use FEMA funds in the approximate amount of \$2,000.

CHARLIE TAYLOR, 55, of Bessemer, Alabama, is charged with one count of making false claims against the government and one count of mail fraud. TAYLOR claimed to be a resident of an area affected by a hurricane, the indictment alleges that TAYLOR was not a resident of an area affected by a hurricane and was not entitled to \$2,000 in relief funds.

LINDA WILLIAMS, 57, of Bessemer, Alabama, is charged with one count of making false claims against the government, three counts of theft of government money or property, and one count of mail fraud. WILLIAMS claimed to be a resident of an area affected by a hurricane, the indictment alleges that WILLIAMS was not a resident of an area affected by a hurricane and was not entitled to \$14,749.51 in disaster relief funds.

And finally a last defendant whose name is withheld pending service of warrant - of Homewood, Alabama, is charged with one count of theft of government money or property. The indictment alleges that this defendant converted to his/her own use FEMA funds in the approximate amount of \$4,926.55.

The maximum penalty for making false claims to the government is five years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. The maximum penalty for mail fraud is twenty years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. The maximum penalty for theft of government money or property is ten years in prison and a fine of \$250,000.

“The Federal Bureau of Investigation is committed to investigate allegations of false claims submitted for disaster relief funds,” states Carmen S. Adams, Special Agent in Charge Federal Bureau of Investigation.

“This is the second installment of investigations in an on-going investigative effort by Department of Homeland Security Office and our law enforcement partners to root out those who would try to capitalize on Federal Emergency Management Association relief funds by schemes of fraud,” states J. Christopher Murphy, Special Agent in Charge, United States Secret Service.

“Postal inspectors have a talent for finding people who commit mail fraud,” states Martin Phanco, Inspector in Charge, Atlanta Division, U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

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 Task Force is assisted by local, state and federal law enforcement.

Anyone with information about fraudulent activity is encouraged to report it immediately through the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General's Hurricane Relief Hotline at 1-866-720-5721. Anyone suspecting criminal activity involving disaster assistance programs can make an anonymous report by calling toll-free Hurricane Relief Fraud Hotline at 1-866-720-5721, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week until further notice. Information can also be emailed to the inspector general at DHSOighotline@dhs.gov or send by surface mail with as many details as possible to: Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC 20528, Attention Office of Inspector General, Hotline. Additionally, criminal activity involving disaster assistance programs can also be reported by calling toll-free the FBI Hurricane Relief Fraud Hotline at 1-800-225-5324. Additionally you may contact the U.S. Postal Inspection Service at 205-326-2900.

Members of the public are reminded that an indictment contains only charges. A defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove a defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

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