



Department of Justice

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Southern District of Texas

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**FORMER HOUSTON RESIDENT CHARGED WITH MAIL FRAUD FOR
FALSE CLAIMS FILED FOR FEMA HURRICANE RELIEF**

Indictment brings to 60 number of persons charged with Katrina Fraud in SDTX

[HOUSTON, Texas] – A former Houston resident has been charged with mail fraud relating to the filing of false claims with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for Hurricane Katrina disaster relief, United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle announced today.

Priscilla A. Thomas, 39, formerly of Houston and presently residing in Baton Rouge, La. was arrested in Baton Rouge on Oct. 22, 2007 and ordered released on bond. Today, Thomas was arraigned in Houston and entered a plea of not guilty before U. S. Magistrate Judge Stephen W. Smith. Trial is set for January 7, 2008 before U. S. District Judge Kenneth M. Hoyt. The Thomas indictment, returned by a Houston grand jury on Oct. 11, 2007, brings to sixty the number of individuals charged in the Southern District of Texas with fraud offenses relating to Hurricane Katrina and/or Hurricane Rita.

Thomas is accused of filing three false claims for Hurricane Katrina disaster assistance. Each of the three claims is charged as a separate count of the indictment. According to the indictment, all three claims were filed on or about September 11, 2005, with each falsely listing Thomas' primary residence as New Orleans, Louisiana, at the time Hurricane Katrina struck the city. Thomas allegedly claimed that as a result of damage to her primary residence, she had an essential need for food, clothing, and shelter as a result of the storm. In each claim Thomas filed, she provided a Houston mailing address to which the disaster payments were mailed and then allegedly received by Thomas.

Upon conviction, each of the three mail fraud counts carries a statutory punishment range of 20 years imprisonment, a maximum three year term of supervised release, and a \$250,000 fine.

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 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 United States Postal Inspection Service and the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, and will be prosecuted by Special Assistant United States Attorney Tammie Y. Moore 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 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 convicted through due process of law.

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