



Department of Justice

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Middle District of Louisiana

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**FOUR INDICTED IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, ON CHARGES
OF CONSPIRACY, WIRE FRAUD, MAIL FRAUD, ACCESS DEVICE FRAUD,
ILLEGAL USE OF SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS, AND AGGRAVATED IDENTITY
THEFT RELATED TO A HURRICANE DISASTER RELIEF PROGRAM**

BATON ROUGE, LA – Four Louisiana residents were indicted in federal court on charges of conspiracy, wire fraud, mail fraud, access device fraud, illegal use of Social Security numbers, and aggravated identity theft related to a hurricane disaster relief program, United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced today.

LATASHA WHITFIELD, age 30; LAKEITHA WRIGHT, age 22; DOMONEIK WHITFIELD, age 21, and TONI WHITFIELD, age 42, all residents of Zachary, Louisiana, were charged in a forty-one count indictment by a federal grand jury as outlined below in connection with an alleged conspiracy to obtain disaster unemployment benefit cards for alleged losses resulting from Hurricane Katrina. The indictment claims that from at least November 4, 2005, and continuing through on or about June 25, 2006, the defendants knowingly conspired with each other and others to file and cause to be filed at least fifty false and fraudulent Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) claims with the Louisiana Department of Labor (LDOL), fraudulently seeking DUA payments of over \$120,000. It is further alleged that, as part of the conspiracy, the defendants falsely represented that Social Security numbers listed on the fraudulent DUA claims were those which had been assigned by the Commissioner of Social Security to the claimants. DUA provides 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 LDOL 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). The defendants were charged as follows:

LATASHA WHITFIELD – one count of conspiracy, eight counts of wire fraud, eleven counts of mail fraud, one count of access device fraud, seven counts of illegal use of Social Security numbers, and one count of aggravated identify theft.

LAKEITHA WRIGHT – one count of conspiracy, four counts of wire fraud, eight counts of mail fraud, one count of access device fraud, and one count of illegal use of Social Security numbers.

DOMONEIK WHITFIELD – one count of conspiracy, four counts of wire fraud, six counts of mail fraud, one count of access device fraud, and two counts of illegal use of Social Security numbers.

TONI WHITFIELD – one count of conspiracy, two counts of wire fraud, two counts of mail fraud, and one count of access device fraud.

The maximum sentence for each conspiracy count is a five year term of imprisonment, a fine the greatest of twice the gross gain, twice the gross loss, or \$250,000, a special assessment of \$100, and supervised release of up to three years after imprisonment. The maximum sentence for each mail or wire fraud count is a twenty year term of imprisonment, a fine the greatest of twice the gross gain, twice the gross loss, or \$250,000, a special assessment of \$100, and supervised release of up to three years after imprisonment. The maximum sentence for each count of illegal use of a social security number is a five year term of imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, a special assessment of \$100, and supervised release of up to three years after imprisonment. Each defendant is charged with one count of access device fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of ten years imprisonment, a fine the greatest of twice the gross gain, twice the gross loss, or \$250,000, a special assessment of \$100, and supervised release of up to three years after imprisonment.

LATASHA WHITFIELD is charged in the last count with aggravated identity theft during and in relation to one of the mail fraud counts she faces. In addition to the mail fraud count penalties, if she is convicted of aggravated identity theft, she must serve a consecutive sentence of two years to any term imposed for the mail fraud penalty. If convicted of all counts, LATASHA WHITFIELD faces a maximum term of imprisonment of 432 years, two of which must be served consecutive to any other term imposed for the related mail fraud violation, a \$7,000,000 fine, or both, plus special assessments of \$2800, and supervised release of up to three years.

If convicted of all counts, LAKEITHA WRIGHT faces a maximum term of imprisonment of 260 years, a \$3,750,000 fine, or both, plus special assessments of \$1500, and supervised release of up to three years.

If convicted of all counts, DOMONEIK WHITFIELD faces a maximum term of imprisonment of 225 years, a \$3,500,000 fine, or both, plus special assessments of \$1400, and supervised release of up to three years.

If convicted of all counts, TONI WHITFIELD faces a maximum term of imprisonment of 90 years, a \$1,500,000 fine, or both, plus special assessments of \$600, and supervised release of up to three years.

The actual sentence imposed in the event of conviction would be determined by the Court in accordance with the United States Sentencing Guidelines.

Today's indictment brings the total number of individuals who have been charged in the Middle District of Louisiana with violations related to hurricane disaster relief funds to ninety-three.

The charges resulted from an investigation conducted 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. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ian F. Hipwell.

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 the FBI, the U.S. Inspectors General community, the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Executive Office for United States Attorneys and others.

For further information, contact David R. Dugas, U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Louisiana, or Lyman Thornton, First Assistant U.S. Attorney, at (225) 389-0443. 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 Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force at HKFTF@leo.gov or sent by surface mail, with as many details as possible, to Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-4909.

NOTE: An indictment is a determination by a grand jury that there is probable cause to believe that offenses have been committed by the defendants. The defendants, of course, are presumed innocent until and unless they are proven guilty at trial.

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