



# Department of Justice

United States Attorney  
Northern District of Texas

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
TUESDAY, JULY 18, 2006  
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**FEDERAL JURY CONVICTS FORT WORTH**  
**WOMAN IN FEMA FRAUD CASE**

*Defendant Took Advantage of a Hurricane Katrina Evacuee*

A federal jury in Fort Worth, Texas, convicted Sheila Harris on two counts of an indictment charging theft of government property and bank burglary, announced United States Attorney Richard B. Roper. The jury deliberated only 90 minutes in the one-day trial held yesterday before the Honorable John McBryde, United States District Judge. Harris, age 39, of Fort Worth, faces a maximum statutory sentence of 30 years imprisonment, a \$500,000.00 fine and restitution. She is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge McBryde on November 3, 2006.

Harris surrendered to federal authorities on April 27, 2006, on charges outlined in a federal criminal complaint filed on April 25, 2006. She was released on her own recognizance with conditions. She was charged in a two-count indictment returned on May 23, 2006 with one count of theft of government property and one count of bank burglary.

The government presented evidence at trial that Willie Jean Payne advised the Fort Worth Police Department in December 2005 that she was a hurricane evacuee and had been sent a disaster assistance check from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the amount of \$21,242.00. She explained that she had been in Mississippi attending her husband's funeral in November 2005 when Sheila Harris opened a letter addressed to her with the FEMA check enclosed. Harris deposited the check, without Ms. Payne's permission, and deposited \$10,000.00 into Harris's daughter's bank account and the remainder, \$11,242.000, into Harris's bank account.

The government also presented evidence that Sheila Harris had been Ms. Payne's food stamp administrator. With financial assistance from another individual, Harris had taken in Ms. Payne for a couple of weeks after Ms. Payne's husband was placed in a hospital. After his release from the hospital, Ms. Payne and her husband moved into a rental home. Ms. Payne now resides in Oklahoma.

U.S. Attorney Richard Roper praised the investigative efforts of the U. S. Secret Service and the Fort Worth Police Department. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Camille Sparks and Paul Gartner.

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