



Department of Justice

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THREE PLEAD GUILTY IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, ON FRAUD CHARGES RELATED TO A HURRICANE DISASTER RELIEF PROGRAM

BATON ROUGE, LA – Three more Louisiana residents pled guilty in federal court on fraud charges 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 indicted on March 7, 2007, on related federal 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. LATASHA WHITFIELD pled guilty on August 28, 2007, to aggravated identity theft and mail fraud charges. LAKEITHA WHITFIELD and DOMONEIK WHITFIELD each pled guilty today to wire fraud and illegal use of Social Security numbers. TONI WHITFIELD pled guilty today to a charge of access device fraud.

The investigation leading to today's guilty pleas uncovered a scheme involving at least 50 false and fraudulent disaster unemployment claims that were filed with the Louisiana Department of Labor (LDOL) seeking disaster unemployment payments of over \$120,000 after Hurricane Katrina. Latasha Whitfield's home computer was used to file many of the claims. 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).

In the plea agreement entered by Latasha Whitfield on August 28th, she agreed that she owed restitution of not less than \$150,223. Latasha Whitfield also pled guilty to an aggravated identity theft charge, involving the use of the Social Security number of another person during her commission of the fraud. That count carries a mandatory two year term of imprisonment to run consecutively to any other term of imprisonment which the court might impose for the mail fraud count to which she pled guilty.

LAKEITHA WRIGHT's restitution provision calls for restitution of not less than \$61,347, while that of DOMONEIK Whitfield calls for a figure of not less than \$32,732. TONI WHITFIELD's restitution amount calls for a figure not less than \$7,742.

The maximum sentence for each mail or wire fraud count is a twenty year term of imprisonment, a fine of \$250,000, or both. The maximum sentence for each count of illegal use of a social security number count is a five year term of imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both. The maximum sentence for the access device fraud count is a ten year term of imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both.

The case 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 was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ian F. Hipwell.

The number of individuals who have been charged in the Middle District of Louisiana with violations related to hurricane disaster relief funds stands at one hundred twenty-eight.

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.

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