



Department of Justice

United States Attorney Alice H. Martin
Northern District of Alabama

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
TUESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2006
WWW.USDOJ.GOV/USAO/ALN

CONTACT: JILL ELLIS
TEL: (205) 244-2015
FAX: (205) 244-2171

FIFTEEN INDIVIDUALS INDICTED FOR FEMA FRAUD IN ALABAMA

BIRMINGHAM, Ala.– Fifteen individuals have been indicted by a federal grand jury in Alabama on allegations of fraud and theft resulting from claims filed with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), U.S. Attorney Alice H. Martin, Special Agent in Charge J. Christopher Murphy and Assistant Special Agent in Charge Roy Sexton, both of the U.S. Secret Service, announced today. The indictments filed allege fraud and theft of federal disaster relief funds from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita which devastated parts of the south in 2005.

“The defendants are charged today with consciously setting out to steal money meant for Hurricane victims,” U.S. Attorney Martin stated during a press conference today. “They will now face the consequences of the federal justice system.”

Special Agents from the U.S. Secret Service led the investigations that resulted in indictments filed against the following individuals:

- Wyshondra Latricia Coleman, 22; Angenica Michelle Jackson, 24; Emily Jackson Bibbs, 41; Shannon Yvonne Bibbs, 23; Jaquetta Shuna Jackson, 23; and Tequica Piketa Jackson, 24, all of Bessemer, Ala., have been charged with false claims against the government and theft of government money or property. The defendants filed with FEMA, claiming to be residents of Texas during the landfall of Hurricane Rita. They reported property damage on their claims for emergency relief funds. A \$2,000 U.S. Treasury check was issued to each individual based on the fraudulent information provided. The defendants allegedly cashed the checks knowing the information they provided was false.
- Larry Williams, 36; Pearlie Mae Jefferson, 48; and Talonya Laquese Jackson, 27, all of Bessemer, Ala., have been charged with making false claims against the government and theft of government property or money. As alleged in the indictment, the defendants submitted requests for FEMA funds and each received a \$2,000 U.S. Treasury check. The defendants allegedly cashed the checks knowing the information provided was false and untrue.
- Derrick D. Pettus, 27, of Birmingham, Ala., has been charged with making false claims against the government and theft of government money or property. Pettus filed a claim with FEMA and claimed to be a resident of New Orleans during the land fall of Hurricane Katrina. As a result of the FEMA claim, a U.S. Treasury Check in the amount of \$2,000 was mailed to Pettus at his address in Birmingham, Ala.. Pettus cashed the Treasury check knowing the information he provided was false.

- Lakeysa L. Wyatt, 29, of Birmingham, Ala., has been charged with making false claims against the government and theft of government money or property. Wyatt made a claim for immediate assistance claiming to be a resident of Galveston, Texas, during the landfall of Hurricane Rita. As a result FEMA issued a U.S. Treasury check in the amount of \$2,000, and mailed the check to Wyatt at her address in Ensley, Ala.. Wyatt then cashed the check knowing the information submitted was false and untrue.
- Steve Small, 30, of Birmingham, Ala., has been charged with making false claims against the government and theft of government property. A claim was filed with FEMA for immediate assistance on behalf of Small. In the request for emergency relief funds, Small claimed to be a resident of New Orleans during the landfall of Hurricane Katrina. FEMA mailed an emergency relief check to Small at his Birmingham address. Small then cashed the check knowing the information submitted was false and untrue.
- Nanette Williams, 39; Terkesha Linette Smith, 31; and Ashley Shatara Johnson, 20, each of Birmingham, Ala., have been charged with making false claims against the government and theft of government money or property. It is alleged that the defendants submitted a request for FEMA funds and received a \$2,000 U.S. Treasury check. Williams, Smith, and Johnson each allegedly cashed the check knowing the information provided was false and untrue.

“These indictments are just the tip of the spear regarding the investigations of fraud and theft of disaster relief funds provided by FEMA,” states Special Agent in Charge J. Christopher Murphy of the U.S. Secret Service. “We follow a zero tolerance policy regarding theft of taxpayer dollars, therefore we intend to fully investigate and present the evidence of fraud and theft for prosecution of the person or persons who perpetrated it.”

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

In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crime, such as charity fraud and insurance fraud. This task force, chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division, U.S. Department of Justice, includes members from the Department of Homeland Security, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Trade Commission, and U.S. Postal Inspection Service. The U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Alabama as well as law enforcement in the Northern District are members of the Task Force.

These cases were investigated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Secret Service. Assistant U.S. Attorneys John H. England, III, and E. Vincent Carroll are prosecuting these matters on behalf of the U.S. Government.

###