



Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, MARCH 30, 2007
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TWO HOUSTON RESIDENTS SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR DEFRAUDING HURRICANE RELIEF PROGRAMS

*Brings to 14 the number sentenced to prison in the Southern District
for Hurricane Katrina and Rita fraud*

(HOUSTON, TX) - A federal judge has sentenced two Houston residents to prison for committing fraud against FEMA Hurricane Katrina and Rita relief programs, United States Attorney Donald J. DeGabrielle, Jr. announced today.

At a hearing today Judge Keith P. Ellison sentenced Belinda Taylor, 31, of Houston, to 22 months in federal prison without parole for filing a fraudulent claim with FEMA for Hurricane Katrina disaster assistance and for fraudulently obtaining a Hurricane Rental Assistance Voucher, which entitled her to a free apartment for a year from the City of Houston. Taylor filed a claim with FEMA on September 3, 2005 for Hurricane Katrina disaster assistance listing a primary residence of 12345 I-10 Service Road in New Orleans and claimed Hurricane Katrina had left her with an essential need for food, clothing, and shelter. Employment records, an interview with a landlord and identification documents proved that Taylor actually resided in Houston before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. Taylor received \$2,000 in expedited assistance and \$2,358 in housing assistance from FEMA before the fraud was discovered. In addition, Taylor obtained a voucher from the City of Houston entitling her to a free apartment for a year after filling out an application listing the same fraudulent 12345 I-10 Service Road address in New Orleans.

In addition to the prison sentence, Judge Ellison ordered Taylor to pay \$7,430 in restitution and serve a three-year term of supervised release after her release from prison.

On Thursday, March 29, 2007, Judge Ellison sentenced Sheldon Mayo, 38, of Houston, to 18 months imprisonment for his use of the registration number assigned to his fraudulent Hurricane Rita disaster assistance claim to fraudulently obtain FEMA-funded lodging at two hotels in the Houston area. The Mayo case involved the Short-Term Lodging Program (SLP) FEMA established in response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita to assist in housing displaced evacuees. Mayo submitted a disaster assistance application in January 2006 falsely claiming to have been displaced from his alleged home in Beaumont, TX. Mayo then used his registration as an alleged Hurricane Rita evacuee to obtain free lodging via the SLP. During the time Mayo committed these acts; he was on federal supervised release for a prior theft of mail conviction, was residing in the Houston area and was not entitled to any form of disaster assistance. In addition to the prison term, Judge Ellison ordered that Mayo pay \$1,547.43 in restitution and serve a three-year term of supervised release after her release.

To date, 43 individuals have been charged in the Southern District of Texas with fraud relating to Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita. The prison terms imposed today brings to 14 the number of defendants sentenced to prison terms in the Southern District in these cases. A number of defendants are still awaiting trial or sentencing hearings.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas is a member of the Department of Justice's Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, created by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales 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 investigating agencies and the United States Attorney's Offices in the Gulf Coast region and nationwide.

The Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General investigated the Mayo and Taylor cases. Special Assistant United States Attorney Jason Varnado prosecuted the Mayo case and Assistant United States Attorney Gregg Costa prosecuted the Taylor case.

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 <<mailto:dhsorghotline@dhs.gov>> or sent by surface mail, with as many details as possible, to: Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC. 20528, Attn: Office of Inspector General, Hotline.

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