



# Department of Justice

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Middle District of Louisiana

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## **DEFENDANT SENTENCED ON CHARGES OF EXTORTION IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA**

United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced today that WAYNE PETER LAWLESS, age 52, of Donaldsonville, Louisiana, was sentenced by United States District Court Judge Frank J. Polozola to serve an 18-month term of imprisonment pursuant to his plea of guilty in July 2006 to a bill of information in federal court charging him with Hobbs Act extortion. LAWLESS was also ordered to serve three years of supervised release and to perform fifty hours of community service after his imprisonment.

The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) provided funding for a variety of disaster-related programs, including disaster unemployment assistance (DUA). The Louisiana Department of Labor (LDOL) administered the DUA program for residents of the State of Louisiana. DUA provided financial assistance to individuals whose employment had been interrupted or lost as a direct result of a major disaster declared by the President of the United States.

LAWLESS worked for a company contracted to assist recruiting efforts of the Louisiana National Guard. He was assigned to work at offices of the Louisiana Department of Labor on Wooddale Boulevard in Baton Rouge in the Fall of 2005. After Hurricane Katrina struck, Lawless was permitted and encouraged to assist people who came to the state office seeking disaster unemployment assistance, and was granted access to certain computer systems used to process unemployment claims. LAWLESS pled guilty to taking money from people, with their consent, "under color of official right"; that is, causing them to believe he could influence their receipt of funds intended for disaster relief.

LAWLESS was ordered to self-surrender to federal prison on January 6, 2009.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Social Security Administration's Office of Inspector General conducted the investigation of this matter, with assistance from the Zachary, Louisiana, Police Department. This matter was prosecuted by Assistant United States 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 fifty-seven.

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](mailto: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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