



# Department of Justice

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Middle District of Louisiana

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## **TWO MORE PLEAD GUILTY IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, ON DISASTER RELIEF FRAUD CHARGES**

BATON ROUGE, LA – United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced that two more Louisiana residents pled guilty today in federal court on fraud charges related to a hurricane disaster relief program.

SHANDOLYN D. THOMAS, age 22, of Baker, Louisiana, pled guilty today before U.S. District Court Judge Frank J. Polozola to Count Three of an indictment charging her with mail fraud. According to the factual basis in the plea agreement, THOMAS caused an application for Hurricane Katrina disaster assistance benefits to be filed on or about September 9, 2005, in which she falsely claimed that her primary residence at the time of the storm was in New Orleans, Louisiana, when, in fact, THOMAS was not living in New Orleans at the time of the storm. The application also falsely claimed that Hurricane Katrina caused damage to THOMAS' home and personal property in New Orleans. The fraudulent application caused three checks totaling over \$9,500.00 to be issued to THOMAS by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The case was investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General. As a result of her guilty plea to Count Three, THOMAS faces a maximum sentence of twenty years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both. As part of the plea agreement, the U.S. Attorney's Office will dismiss Counts One, Two, and Four of the indictment when THOMAS is sentenced on Count Three.

WAKITA A. TONEY, age 22, of Baton, Louisiana, pled guilty today before U.S. District Court Judge Frank J. Polozola to Count One of an indictment charging her with mail fraud. According to the factual basis in the plea agreement, THOMAS caused an application for Hurricane Katrina disaster assistance benefits to be filed on or about September 17, 2005, in which she falsely claimed that her primary residence at the time of the storm was in New Orleans, Louisiana, when, in fact, TONEY was not living in New Orleans at the time of the storm. The application also falsely claimed that Hurricane Katrina caused damage to TONEY's home and personal property in New Orleans. The fraudulent application caused a check in the amount of \$2,000.00 to be issued to TONEY by FEMA. The case was investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General. As a result of her guilty plea to Count One, TONEY faces a maximum sentence of twenty years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both. As part of the plea agreement, the U.S. Attorney's Office will dismiss Count Two of the indictment when TONEY is sentenced on Count Two.

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-five.

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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