



U.S. Department of Justice
United States Attorney
Southern District of Mississippi

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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TWELVE MISSISSIPPIANS CHARGED WITH STUDENT LOAN FRAUD

Jackson, Miss - A federal grand jury has indicted twelve Mississippians for their involvement in a scheme to defraud the United States Department of Education of federal student aid funds, U.S. Attorney John Dowdy announced today. Stephanie R. Brewer a/k/a Stephanie R. Williams, 41, Kashayla Henry, 32, Laketa Vaughn, 31, and Laketra Vaughn, 31, of Columbus; Shawanda Bryant, 36, Frances Rigdon, 35, Lakeisha Smith, 28, Shameka Smith, 29, Shanika Smith, 25, Tommie Wallace, 44, and Santario Yates, 21, of Macon; and Cedrick Thomas, 29, of Shuqualak, were charged in the 22-count indictment returned on Tuesday, November 1, 2011. The charges include mail fraud, financial aid fraud and conspiracy to commit mail fraud and financial aid fraud.

According to the indictment, the defendants prepared and submitted fraudulent student admission applications and loan applications, and received federal financial aid when they never intended to attend the online courses. The indictment alleges that Stephanie Brewer expected a "fee" or "cut" of approximately \$800.00 from the federal financial aid awarded to each fraudulent student. As a result, over \$52,000 in student loan and grant funds were unlawfully disbursed to these defendants.

The case is scheduled for trial on January 9, 2012 before U.S. District Judge Henry T. Wingate in Jackson. If found guilty, Stephanie Brewer, who is named in all 22 counts of the indictment, faces a maximum penalty of 260 years in prison. Kashayla Henry faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, and each of the remaining defendants face a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison.

Agents from the United States Department of Education Office of Inspector General conducted the investigation in this case.

U.S. Attorney Dowdy noted that, as in any criminal case, a person is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty. The charges filed merely contain allegations of criminal conduct.

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