



# **PRESS RELEASE**

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Leura G. Canary, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama, announced that on November 15, 2005, a federal grand jury returned separate indictments against the following Montgomery residents:

Natasha Risay Howard, age 28

Valarie Howard, age 32

Crystal Denise Phillips, age 21

Angela Michelle Williams, age 37

All four individuals are charged with fraudulently obtaining or attempting to obtain disaster assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. All four allegedly submitted applications for benefits to FEMA claiming that they had suffered damage to property they rented as their principal residence in Harvey, Louisiana. In fact, the defendants lived in Montgomery, not Louisiana, and did not suffer the losses claimed. As a result of the false claims, Natasha Howard and

**Members of the public are reminded that the indictment contains only charges. A defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove a defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.**

Valarie Howard each received a benefit check for \$2,000. Williams received two checks, one for \$2000 and one for \$2358. Philips received a \$2000 check but was unsuccessful in her efforts to cash it.

Natasha Howard and Valarie Howard are each charged with one count of theft of government property, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 641. Williams is charged with two such counts. Each of the theft-of-government-property counts carries a statutory maximum penalty of ten years imprisonment. Phillips is charged with one count of mail fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1341, which carries a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment.

All of the defendants were arrested today and had their initial appearances, at which point they were released on bail. Their next court appearance is their arraignment, which is set for November 30, 2005.

The case was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, with assistance from the Montgomery Police Department. The case will be prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Andrew O. Schiff.

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