



# Department of Justice

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## **RECIPIENT OF HURRICANE KATRINA DISASTER FUNDS SENTENCED FOR STEALING \$60,200**

**Greenbelt**, Maryland - U.S. District Judge Deborah K. Chasanow sentenced Schewanda Baptiste, age 42, formerly of Waldorf, Maryland, today to three years probation, the first eight months to be served on home detention with electronic monitoring and ordered her to perform 200 hours of community service, for the theft of \$60,200 in Hurricane Katrina disaster relief benefits, announced United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein. Judge Chasanow also ordered Baptiste to pay restitution to the Federal Emergency Management Agency of \$49,458. The agency had already recouped the difference from Baptiste after she applied for aid through another federal program.

According to her plea agreement, from 2003 to November 2008 Baptiste owned a home in New Orleans. She moved from Louisiana to Maryland in the summer of 2005 and rented her home in New Orleans to a woman and her two minor children. Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29-30, 2005 in Louisiana, extensively damaging the home in New Orleans and causing the renter and her children to evacuate. Baptiste was in Maryland on August 29, 2005 enrolling her daughter in school.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provided emergency assistance to victims of the hurricane who were left homeless. It was not a substitute for insurance and was not available to individuals who were not living in homes damaged by the hurricane. Baptiste, in fact, had private insurance which covered the property damage to her home in New Orleans.

On September 13, 2005 Baptiste submitted a fraudulent application to FEMA for disaster assistance relief which falsely claimed that at the time of the hurricane, the New Orleans home was her primary residence and that she lived there with her two children. In February 2006, Baptiste submitted a false lease to FEMA in order to obtain further benefits and to convince FEMA that she had been living in New Orleans at the time of the hurricane. She obtained approximately \$30,200 in FEMA disaster relief assistance.

Baptiste also fraudulently applied for and obtained \$30,000 in grant funds from the Community Development Block Grant which was set up by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide disaster assistance.

The renter of the home in New Orleans properly applied for disaster assistance relief in September 2005. As a result of Baptiste's fraudulent applications, the renter's disaster relief assistance application was subjected to greater scrutiny and payments to the renter were delayed.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein thanked the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development - Office of Inspector General and the Department of Homeland Security -

Office of Inspector General for their investigative work. Mr. Rosenstein commended Assistant United States Attorney Sandra Wilkinson, who prosecuted the case.