



PRESS RELEASE

**Office of the
United States Attorney
Middle District of Alabama
Leura Garrett Canary**

MONTGOMERY WOMAN INDICTED IN HURRICANE KATRINA FRAUD

Leura G. Canary, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama, announced that on January 20, 2006, a federal grand jury returned an indictment against Laura Lee Phillips, age 44, a resident of Montgomery County, charging her with fraudulently obtaining disaster assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The indictment alleges that Ms. Phillips submitted applications for benefits to FEMA claiming that she had suffered damage to property she rented as her primary residence in Louisiana. The indictment further alleges that, in fact, the defendant lived in Montgomery, not Louisiana, and did not suffer the losses claimed. As a result of the false claims, she received benefit checks for \$2,000 and \$2,358, respectively.

Ms. Phillips is charged with two counts of theft of government property, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 641. Each count carries a statutory maximum penalty of ten years imprisonment.

Ms. Phillips surrendered to the U.S. Marshal on February 17, 2006; her initial appearance was held on the same day and she was released on bail. Phillips' trial is set for June 26, 2006.

To date, there have been a total of ten indictments returned in the Middle District for Katrina related fraud.

The case was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General. The case will be prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher A. Snyder.

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.