



Department of Justice

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FOUR SENTENCED IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, ON CHARGES RELATED TO THEFT OF FUNDS FROM A HURRICANE DISASTER RELIEF PROGRAM

BATON ROUGE, LA – United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced that four Louisiana residents were sentenced yesterday by United States District Court Judge John V. Parker for their part in a conspiracy to defraud a federal hurricane disaster relief program of over \$150,000.

All four defendants are residents of Zachary, Louisiana, and were charged in connection with Hurricane Katrina disaster relief fraud. LATASHA WHITFIELD, age 32, was sentenced to a 54-month prison term pursuant to her guilty plea to one count of mail fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. She was also ordered to serve a three-year term of supervised release after her imprisonment, and to pay \$150,223 in restitution to the Louisiana Department of Labor (LDOL), which administered the federal disaster unemployment assistance (DUA) program. DUA provides financial assistance to individuals whose employment has been lost or interrupted as a result of a major disaster declared by the President of the United States.

LAKEITHA WRIGHT, age 23, was sentenced to a four-month term of imprisonment pursuant to her guilty plea to one count of wire fraud and one count of illegal use of a Social Security number. She was also sentenced to a three-year term of supervised release following her imprisonment, which includes a four-month term of home detention with electronic monitoring by probation officers, the costs for which she must pay. In addition, she was ordered to pay \$61,347 in restitution to the Louisiana Department of Labor.

DOMONEIK WHITFIELD, age 22, was sentenced to five years probation pursuant to her guilty plea to one count of wire fraud and one count of illegal use of a Social Security number. She was also sentenced to a four-month term of home detention and ordered to pay \$32,732 in restitution to the Louisiana Department of Labor.

TONI WHITFIELD, age 44, was sentenced to five years probation pursuant to her guilty plea to one count of access device fraud. She was also sentenced to five years probation and ordered to pay \$7,742 in restitution to the Louisiana Department of Labor.

All four defendants were originally charged in a forty-one count indictment by a federal grand jury charging that from November 4, 2005, through June 25, 2006, the defendants knowingly conspired to file at least fifty fraudulent DUA claims with the LDOL, seeking DUA payments of over \$120,000.

The case resulted from an investigation conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General, the Social Security Administration's Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Louisiana State Police, and the Zachary, Louisiana, Police Department. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ian F. Hipwell.

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 forty-three.

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 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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