

The United States Attorney's Office

Middle District of Louisiana

24 June **FEMA Fraud - Thomas Sentenced**

ANOTHER SENTENCED IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, ON DISASTER RELIEF FRAUD CHARGES

BATON ROUGE, LA – United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced that another Louisiana resident was sentenced yesterday on fraud charges related to a hurricane disaster relief program. SHANDOLYN D. THOMAS, age 23, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, pled guilty on October 2, 2008, to mail fraud in connection with the filing of a false and fraudulent application with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for Hurricane Katrina disaster assistance benefits. In the application, THOMAS fraudulently claimed that her primary residence at the time of the storm was in New Orleans, Louisiana, when, in fact, THOMAS was residing in Baton Rouge. The fraudulent application caused three checks totaling over \$9,500.00 to be issued to THOMAS by FEMA. The Court also found that THOMAS solicited numerous other individuals to file fraudulent applications for disaster assistance benefits. THOMAS was sentenced yesterday by U.S. District Court Judge Frank J. Polozola to a term of imprisonment of thirty-three months, three years of supervised release, and \$9,553 in restitution. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General conducted the investigation of this matter.

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 seventy-five.

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 the Assistant Attorney General of the U.S. Department of Justice's 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.