

Former Government Contractor Convicted of Defrauding FEMA and Georgia-Based Litigation Funding Company

Friday, January 24, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Georgia

ATLANTA - Following an eight-day trial, Tiffany Brown was found guilty by a jury of defrauding the Federal Emergency Management Agency ("FEMA") in connection with a nearly \$156 million contract she was awarded to provide self-heating meals to the residents of Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, and for fraudulently obtaining \$700,000 in litigation advances from the Litigation Funding Group of Georgia ("LFG") by falsely claiming that she had settled with a logistics company who failed to deliver the meals to FEMA.

"Brown resorted to extraordinary lengths to defraud FEMA during a critical period when individuals were in desperate need of food resources during the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Maria," said Acting U.S. Attorney Richard S. Moultrie, Jr. "Our Office, along with our law enforcement partners, will remain vigilant in pursuing and prosecuting individuals who exploit the devastation caused by natural disasters as an opportunity to commit fraud."

"We will continue to investigate and support the prosecution of fraudsters who target vulnerable populations for their own gains," said DHS Inspector General Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D.

"Brown greedily deceived the federal government during a natural disaster to enrich herself," said Sean Burke, Acting Special Agent in Charge of FBI Atlanta. "The FBI and our partners will aggressively pursue any person who seeks to defraud the government, especially during times of tragedy."

According to Acting U.S. Attorney Moultrie, the charges and other information presented in court: On September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria made landfall as a Category 4 hurricane in Puerto Rico. In its

wake, FEMA issued a solicitation for 40 million self-heating meals per week to deliver to the island. Meals requiring a microwave or an external heating source, such as for boiling water, were unacceptable. FEMA issued the meal solicitation because it had exhausted its existing supply of self-heating meals from its own warehouses, primary vendors, and federal agency partners in responding to Hurricanes Harvey and Irma— both Category 4 hurricanes that impacted broad swaths of Texas, Louisiana, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

On September 28, 2017, Brown submitted a proposal to FEMA falsely representing that her Georgia-based company, Tribute Contracting LLC, could provide the necessary self-heating meals. In doing so, Brown misrepresented that Tribute: (a) could deliver 10 million meals per day utilizing 210 trucks; (b) would provide 300,000 meals prepositioned; and (c) had partnered with C.H. Robinson, a major shipping and logistics broker, to meet FEMA's delivery requirements.

But Tribute was incapable of delivering 10 million meals, never prepositioned any meals, and did not have the claimed partnership. A FEMA contracting officer spoke with Brown after receiving Tribute's proposal. The contracting officer knew that U.S.-based manufacturers could not produce the number of meals that Brown claimed in her proposal. In response, Brown falsely represented that she was procuring the self-heating meals from Action Meals, a Canadian manufacturer. Brown sent FEMA a doctored image of an Action Meals package with a fraudulent expiration date.

Based on her conversation with the contracting officer, Brown submitted a revised proposal falsely representing that she had firm confirmation from her "core suppliers for 30 million self-heating meals in 30 days" and that she could begin delivering one million meals a day beginning on October 7, 2017.

On October 3, 2017, FEMA awarded Tribute and Brown a \$155,982,000 contract requiring the delivery of 30 million self-heating meals between October 7 and October 23, 2017. FEMA had to confirm that Tribute's proposed meal was "technically acceptable" before approving the delivery. FEMA approved Brown's proposal in part because it understood that Brown would deliver self-heating meals manufactured by Action Meals. Unbeknownst to FEMA, Brown had not secured a supplier when she was awarded the FEMA contract. After being awarded the contract, Brown repeatedly misrepresented to FEMA the status of her suppliers and timing of deliveries.

On October 19, 2017, FEMA terminated its contract with Brown and Tribute. Before doing so, however, FEMA paid Brown \$255,000 based on her submission of fraudulent invoices and bills of lading claiming that she had successfully delivered 50,000 self-heating meals. Brown in fact had delivered 50,000 non-compliant, dehydrated meals. After FEMA terminated the contract, Brown continued making false representations to FEMA. For example, Brown submitted fraudulent invoices in December 2017 and June 2019 claiming to have purchased tens of thousands of dollars of heaters.

In March 2019, Brown falsely represented to LFG that she had a tentative \$5 million settlement with a logistics company, Total Quality Logistics ("TQL"). Brown claimed that TQL was willing to settle with her

because it failed to timely deliver meals to FEMA, which she claimed was the reason FEMA terminated her contract. In truth, TQL obtained a default judgment against Brown for unpaid deliveries.

To secure the fraudulent litigation financing, Brown provided LFG with a mix of actual and fabricated documents. For instance, she provided the real FEMA contract, but a fraudulent tentative settlement agreement, and fabricated emails between TQL's general counsel and "Jerry Rosenstein," Tribute's purported in-house counsel. Brown further perpetrated the fraud by using her attorney to create the illusion that she was a successful government contractor who was negotiating directly with TQL. Brown later falsely claimed she settled with TQL for \$6.5 million, which she evidenced by an agreement that TQL's CEO supposedly signed. The scheme unraveled when TQL did not pay the \$6.5 million, and Brown's attorney received an email from a "James Wilson," who was supposedly an in-house attorney at TQL. "James Wilson" wrote that he was willing to release the settlement funds in exchange for \$500,000. Investigators later determined that Brown was responsible for creating the fake "Jerry Rosenstein" and "James Wilson" personas.

Tiffany Brown, 45, of Atlanta, Georgia is scheduled to be sentenced on April 22, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. by U.S. District Judge Thomas W. Thrash, Jr. Brown was found guilty by a federal jury on January 17, 2025, of 11 counts of major disaster fraud, 17 counts of wire fraud, one count of theft of government money, and three counts of money laundering.

This case is being investigated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with valuable assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Office of Chief Counsel.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Alex R. Sistla and Jessica C. Morris are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact the U.S. Attorney's Public Affairs Office at USAGAN.PressEmails@usdoj.gov or (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is <http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga>.

Updated January 24, 2025