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## **City Attorney's ID Theft Unit Charges 12 People with Grand Theft, Conspiracy in Katrina-Related Fraud**

*Two Others Also Charged By Delgadillo's Office After Department of Homeland Security Investigation Finds Fake FEMA Claims Filed in L.A.*

**LOS ANGELES** – City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo today said his office had charged 14 people with crimes related to fraudulent claims for benefits from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) stemming from Hurricane Katrina last year.

Twelve of those charged are alleged to have participated in a conspiracy that involved applying for benefits FEMA made available to those who suffered losses in the hurricane. The defendants, all residents of Los Angeles, applied for and received up to \$2,000 each after claiming losses at non-existent addresses in Abita Springs, La. The individual defendants face from one to three years in jail on charges of grand theft and conspiracy.

Another defendant not tied to the alleged conspiracy received a \$2,000 benefit check from FEMA as the result of a fraudulent claim for an address in New Orleans. The true resident of that address also sought benefits and had her application denied. All told, the 14 defendants face 31 criminal counts.

“This kind of fraud victimizes everyone,” said Delgadillo. “These people are stealing from the government as it seeks to provide quick service to its people as well as from those who truly deserve benefits.”

Investigators from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) uncovered the fraud and referred the results of the investigation to the Identity Theft Unit of the City Attorney's Criminal and Special Litigation Branch for prosecution. Arraignments are set for August 15, 16 and 17 in Division 81 of the Los Angeles Superior Court.

“Hurricane Katrina was a devastating natural disaster that affected thousands of people in Louisiana, Mississippi and sections of the Gulf Coast,” said Richard L. Skinner, inspector general for the Department of Homeland Security. “It is very disappointing to find individuals who will commit fraud and theft to obtain Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds to which they are not entitled. We remain committed to working with our internal and external partners to aggressively identify and investigate FEMA fraud cases to preserve the integrity of DHS programs and operations.”

Those charged were:

- April Martin: grand theft, criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment: one year in county jail.
- Starkisha Miller: grand theft, criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment: one year in county jail.
- Ruby Mae Jones: grand theft (two counts), criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment: two years in county jail.
- Jennifer Nicole Hunter: grand theft (three counts), and one count of criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment: three years in county jail.
- Rhazon Smith: grand theft (two counts), criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment is two years in county jail.
- Shomari Watson: grand theft, criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment is 1 year in county jail.
- Bernadine Sims: grand theft (two counts), criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment: two years in county jail.
- Lyncoln King: grand theft, criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment: one year in county jail.
- Michelle Speck: grand theft, criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment: one year in county jail.
- Christine Malone: grand theft, criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment: one year in county jail.
- Tequila Davis: grand theft, criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment: one year in county jail.
- Brandy Jiles: grand theft, criminal conspiracy to commit crime. Maximum punishment: one year in county jail.
- Anthony Richardson grand theft. Maximum punishment: one year in county jail.
- Tailynne Perry: grand theft. Maximum punishment: one year in county jail.

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