

15 Portland residents accused of Katrina fraud

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Indictments charge defendants with fraudulently seeking disaster relief funds designated for Hurricane Katrina victims

PORTLAND, Ore. - Fifteen Portland-area residents have been charged in connection with the fraudulent receipt of Hurricane Katrina disaster relief funds, announced Karin J. Immergut, the United States Attorney for the District of Oregon. The indictments were returned by a federal grand jury in Portland on April 25, 2007 and the last of the fifteen defendants appeared for arraignment on May 14, 2007.

Abraham Allen, 22; Bernadine Raiford, 30; Lavonne Ribbon, 25; Leonard Roach, 50; Terri Ryce, 35; Tracy Stewart, 35; Trina Stewart, 38; and Teddy Warren, 22; are all charged with one count of Receipt of Stolen Government Property, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Elizabeth Ellis, 37; Edward Frye, 33; Maria Lopez, 26; and Maranda Smith, 28; are all charged with two counts of Receipt of Stolen Government Property. Dennis Scott, 34, and Willie Frye, 34, are charged with three counts of Receipt of Stolen Government Property. Makeitho Herring, 31, is charged with one count of Receipt of Stolen Government Property, and four counts of Mail Fraud, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$1,000,000.

The charges stem from a federal investigation by the Postal Inspection Service, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, and the Department of Health & Human Services Office of Inspector General, into allegations that Portland-area residents made false statements in order to qualify for Hurricane Katrina Expedited Assistance disaster relief payments in the amount of \$2,000 and Rental Assistance payments in the amount of \$2,358 by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). To legally qualify for the funds, a person must have been displaced from his or her primary residence and be in need of shelter as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

Federal investigators have determined that checks were issued by FEMA payable to Portland-area residents named in these indictments based on false representations that the defendants, or persons recruited by defendants, were displaced by Hurricane Katrina. The indictments in these cases allege that the defendants received one or more FEMA disaster assistance checks knowing they were stolen. The indictment charging Makeitho Herring further alleges that he used the United States mail as part of a scheme to defraud the United States Department of Treasury.

"Stealing government funds intended to go to the victims of Hurricane Katrina is a violation of our national trust and the laws of this country. Unlawfully profiting from the misfortune of others is appalling, and those who commit such crimes will be aggressively prosecuted," stated U.S. Attorney Karin Immergut.

Since April 25, 2007, when indictments were returned by a grand jury, the above-named defendants have appeared in federal court and been arraigned on federal criminal charges. In a related 2006 investigation, eleven persons in the District of Oregon pled guilty and were sentenced in connection with the fraudulent receipt of Hurricane Katrina disaster relief funds.

A criminal indictment is only an allegation and not evidence of guilt. Defendants are presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Craig Gabriel and Amy Potter.

15 Portland residents accused of Katrina fraud by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources