



Department of Justice

United States Attorney Dunn Lampton Southern District of Mississippi

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CONTACT: SHEILA WILBANKS
PHONE: (601) 965-4480
FAX: (601) 965-4409

JONES COUNTY WOMAN SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR KATRINA FRAUD

Gulfport, Miss. – **Catherine A. Pruitt** of Ellisville, Mississippi, was sentenced today by U.S. District Judge Halil S. Ozerden to serve 10 months in prison followed by 3 years of supervised release with 40 hours of community service for Katrina fraud, U.S. Attorney Dunn Lampton announced. She was also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$4,358.00 to FEMA.

Pruitt filed for disaster benefits with FEMA and for a home grant through the Mississippi Development Authority claiming property in Pass Christian, Mississippi, which she had not lived in since 2002, as her primary residence. The Court found that **Pruitt** attempted to get a Phase II grant with elevation funds in the amount of \$130,000.00. On February 8, 2008, **Pruitt** pled guilty to making a false statement to the Mississippi Development Authority regarding her primary residence, and to mail fraud for receiving money from FEMA.

In September, 2005, former Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the national 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 for the Criminal Division, Alice S. Fisher, includes members from the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, the Postal Inspector's Office and the Executive Office of United States Attorneys, among others.

Pursuant to the Justice Department initiative, a local Katrina Fraud Task Force, consisting of over 20 Federal and State law enforcement agencies, was formed in the Southern District of Mississippi to pursue and prosecute individuals who engage in fraud associated with the hurricanes. The Mississippi State Auditor Fraud Prevention and Protection Unit investigates allegations of fraud in the Homeowner Grant Program as part of the local task force.

If anyone has information concerning possible fraud being committed during the post-Katrina recovery effort, please call either the DHS-OIG Fraud Hotline at 1-866-720-5721 or the FBI Fraud Hotline at 1-800-225-5324.

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