

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Middle District of Louisiana

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Federal Jury Convicts Louisiana Woman in Connection with Disaster Fraud and Identity Theft Scheme

U.S. Attorney Brandon J. Fremin, who also serves as the Executive Director of the National Center for Disaster Fraud, announced today that a jury has convicted **RENATA FOREMAN**, age 38, of Independence, Louisiana, on multiple wire fraud and aggravated identity theft counts following a three-day trial before U.S. District Judge Shelly D. Dick. The charges relate to **FOREMAN's** scheme to fraudulently obtain over \$150,000 in federal disaster assistance funds from FEMA following the historic August 2016 flooding in Louisiana.

Following the 2016 flooding, which affected 20 parishes in south Louisiana, FEMA funds were available to people who became unemployed because of the flood. The funds were administered by the Louisiana Workforce Commission in the form of Disaster Unemployment Assistance ("DUA"). In total, **FOREMAN** submitted approximately 55 fraudulent applications using stolen identities.

At trial, the jury heard testimony and saw evidence that **FOREMAN** kept logs and notebooks containing personally identifiable information (PII) of numerous people which she used in her scheme. The evidence also showed that **FOREMAN** submitted fraudulent claims from multiple locations in New Orleans and the surrounding area. During the commission of the crime, **FOREMAN** was residing in a federal halfway house stemming from her 2013 convictions for mail fraud, theft of government funds, and identity theft. As a result of yesterday's conviction, **FOREMAN** could face a significant prison term and fines.

"We will continue to aggressively pursue fraudsters who are taking advantage of and exploiting vulnerable people who have been affected by devastating natural disasters," said U.S. Attorney Brandon J. Fremin. The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Louisiana, together with the National Center for Disaster Fraud and our federal, state, and local law enforcement partners, is working diligently to root out fraudulent claims for assistance and ensure that government funds are available to those who truly are in need." Fremin also thanked the Louisiana Workforce Commission ("LWC") for identifying the potential fraud early on and working with the U.S. Attorney's Office, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to prosecute this important case. "Close cooperation with our state partners such as the LWC is the only way we can truly combat this type of fraud."

Steve Grell, Special Agent-in-Charge, Dallas Region, of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, stated, "Renata Foreman stole the identities of more than 50 victims, including deceased persons, in an attempt to fraudulently obtain over \$150,000 in financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Labor's Disaster Unemployment Assistance Program. We will continue to work with our federal and state law enforcement partners to protect those benefits intended for individuals unemployed as a direct result of a major disaster."

Members of the public are reminded to apply a critical eye and do their due diligence before trusting anyone purporting to be working on behalf of disaster victims. Members of the public who suspect fraud, waste, abuse, or allegations of mismanagement involving disaster relief operations, or believe

they have been the victim of fraud from a person or organization soliciting relief funds on behalf of disaster victims, should contact the National Disaster Fraud Hotline toll free at (866) 720-5721. The telephone line is staffed by a live operator 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can also fax information to the Center at (225) 334-4707, or email it to disaster@leo.gov (link sends e-mail). Learn more about the National Center for Disaster Fraud at www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud.

This matter is being investigated by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General and the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"). The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Pete Smyczek and Fred Menner.