



PRESS RELEASE

Hampstead Woman Sentenced to Prison for Disaster Fraud

Wednesday, March 8, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of North Carolina

RALEIGH, N.C. – A Hampstead woman was sentenced today to 12 months and 1 day in prison, followed by five years of supervised release for fraudulent disaster assistance claims following Hurricane Florence. On November 17, 2022, Dishawn Batts pled guilty. As part of the judgment, Batts was also ordered to pay \$24,835.50 in criminal restitution to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"This defendant schemed to steal from a taxpayer-funded program that was intended to help displaced families recover from a natural disaster by providing necessary housing and utility assistance," said U.S. Attorney Michael Easley. "Now, she will be housed in a federal prison and required to repay every penny she stole."

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Inspector General, Dr. Joseph V. Cuffari, said, "I appreciate the continued partnership between DHS OIG and the Justice Department. Defrauding the U.S. government is unconscionable. This guilty plea should serve as a deterrent to individuals intent on fleecing our federal system."

According to court documents and other information presented in court, in an application for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster assistance, Batts falsely claimed she had been displaced by Hurricane Florence and was living in a temporary rental residence. Her initial application was approved, and Batts was awarded funds for personal property damage and two months of rental assistance. From September 15, 2018 to November 27, 2019, Batts submitted a series of claims for continued rental assistance wherein Batts falsely represented that she remained displaced and unable to return to her primary residence. In support of these claims, Batts submitted fraudulent documentation including phony lease agreements, rental receipts, utilities records, and Social Security Administration records. As a result, Batts received \$24,835.50 in assistance for which she did not qualify.

The FEMA is an agency of the United States Department of Homeland Security. FEMA administers disaster assistance to individuals in areas declared by the President as an emergency or major disaster. FEMA offers different types of assistance to people in disaster areas, including through the Individuals and Households Program (IHP), which provides for financial assistance and other services to eligible individuals for losses caused by a disaster that were not covered by insurance or other assistance programs. One component of IHP, Financial Housing Assistance, provided funds to eligible applicants who lack the means to meet serious needs, including housing-related expenses such as home repair and replacement costs, and rental assistance for temporary housing accommodations while an applicant was displaced from their primary residence. Individuals awarded rental assistance through IHP can reapply for continued temporary rental assistance.

Between September 12, 2018 and September 15, 2018, Hurricane Florence impacted the coast North Carolina, resulting in Major Disaster Declaration [DR-4393] for Eastern North Carolina counties. As a result of the declaration, individuals in areas affected by Hurricane Florence were eligible to apply for disaster assistance from FEMA.

Michael Easley, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina made the announcement after sentencing by U.S. District Judge James C. Dever III. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General investigated the case and Assistant U.S. Attorney Toby Lathan prosecuted the case.

Related court documents and information can be found on the website of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina or on PACER by searching for Case No. 7:22-CR-00068-D.

Topics: DISASTER FRAUD

Component

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