



*United States Attorney
District of New Jersey*

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**SOUTH JERSEY WOMAN SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR
DEFRAUDING FEMA AFTER MAJOR DISASTER**

CAMDEN, N.J. – An Atlantic City, N.J., woman was sentenced today to 27 months in prison for stealing benefit money from FEMA through fraud relating to a presidential disaster declaration for the state of New Jersey after the nor'easter in 2010, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Debbie Hicks, 52, previously pleaded guilty to an information charging her with disaster benefits fraud and making false statements to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. She entered her guilty plea before U.S. District Judge Joseph E. Irenas, who imposed the sentence today in Camden federal court.

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

Due to FEMA's size and the large number of victims typically resulting from a disaster, FEMA frequently has been targeted in disaster fraud schemes by individuals or groups seeking FEMA monetary assistance for benefits to which they were not entitled.

On April 12, 2010, Hicks filed an application with FEMA seeking federal rental assistance under FEMA's Individual Assistance Program, claiming that her apartment in Atlantic City was damaged as a result of the severe storm and was unfit for occupancy.

On April 13, 2010, a FEMA inspector confirmed Hicks' occupancy and the damage to her rental unit, and declared her apartment uninhabitable. FEMA then awarded Hicks \$923 per month in rental assistance. In her application to FEMA Hicks failed to disclose that her rent was being paid by the Atlantic County Department of Family and Community Development.

During the plea hearing, Hicks admitted that she lied on various forms that were sent to FEMA in order to continue receiving money. As a result of the fraud, Hicks received \$15,691 in FEMA emergency rental assistance funds to which she was not entitled.

Hicks also admitted that, while she was defrauding FEMA, she lied to the Housing

Authority and Urban Redevelopment Agency of the City of Atlantic City, which administers housing funds on behalf of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Hicks admitted that, when she applied for Section 8 housing, she failed to tell the housing authority that she was receiving funds from both FEMA and the Atlantic County Department of Family and Community Development. Hicks also admitted she lied about her prior criminal record and the fact that she had used other names and Social Security numbers.

In addition to the prison term, Judge Irenas sentenced Hicks to serve three years of supervised release and ordered her to pay \$15,691 in restitution to FEMA and \$7,200 to HUD.

U.S. Attorney Fishman credited special agents of the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gregory Null, and special agents of HUD, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Joseph W. Clarke, for the investigation leading to today's sentence.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jason M. Richardson of the U.S. Attorney's Office Criminal Division in Camden.

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Defense counsel: Maggie Moy Esq., Assistant Federal Public Defender, Camden