



PRESS RELEASE

Morgan City Woman Convicted by Lafayette Jury of Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Louisiana

LAFAYETTE, La. – Karen Hawkins Gier, 53, of Morgan City, Louisiana, was convicted yesterday afternoon by a federal jury of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, announced United States Attorney Brandon B. Brown. United States District Judge James D. Cain, Jr. presided over the trial this week.

Gier was charged in an indictment in November 2021 with conspiracy to commit wire fraud in connection with fraudulently applying for disaster benefits from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which is an agency of the United States Department of Homeland Security.

In August 2016, severe flooding impacted south Louisiana and a Presidential disaster declaration was issued on August 14, 2016 under the authority of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. The incident period covered August 11, 2016 through August 31, 2016. FEMA was authorized to provide transportation assistance for repair or replacement of a primary vehicle damaged by the disaster.

Between August 11, 2016 and March 30, 2017, Gier, acting in concert with others, made false statements and representations to FEMA in applications for transportation benefits and submitted fake invoices from non-existent mechanic shops. Gier's false representations to FEMA included lying about vehicles being flooded when they were not, and lying about the location of the vehicles being in a disaster area, when in fact they were not. Gier also included fake mechanic shop invoices in the applications to FEMA showing repair estimates that were completely made up by her and other co-conspirators. FEMA disbursed benefits for these alleged damages to the claimants who would then pay a portion of those funds to Gier as a kickback for submitting their fraudulent applications.

Gier faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine of up to \$250,000. Sentencing for Gier is scheduled for June 29, 2023.

A co-defendant in this case, Justin Maurice Hawkins, pleaded guilty to a Bill of Information charging him with one count of theft of government funds. Hawkins is scheduled to be sentenced May 4, 2023.

The case was investigated by the Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Lauren L. Gardner and J. Luke Walker.