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D.A. BROWN: HURRICANE KATRINA VICTIM CHARGED
WITH DISASTER ASSISTANCE FRAUD

Allegedly Filed Relief Application in Ex-Husband's Name

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that a New Orleans woman who fled the city in the wake of Hurricane Katrina last year has been charged with defrauding the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) out of thousands of dollars in disaster relief funds. The defendant, who had legitimately received FEMA funds in her own name, then allegedly used her ex-husband's name to obtain additional monies.

District Attorney Brown said, "The federal government was there when the defendant desperately needed a helping hand. Instead of being grateful, the defendant allegedly then used her other hand to pick the federal government's pockets of thousands of additional dollars."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Cherrelle Porche (a/k/a Cherrelle V. Spotson), 27, presently of 188-48 85th Road in Holliswood, Queens. She was arraigned last night before Queens Criminal Court Judge Steven W. Paynter on charges of first-degree identity theft, fourth-degree grand larceny and second-degree falsifying business records. The defendant, who was ordered held on \$1,500 bail and directed to return to court on October 11, 2006, faces up to seven years in prison if convicted.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the criminal charges, the defendant submitted an application to FEMA for disaster assistance in her ex-husband's name – Levodge Spotson – on September 13, 2005, using the New Orleans' Thayer Street address of her former mother-in-law. Based on a review of the application, FEMA electronically transferred a total of \$4,358 in disaster funds on two separate occasions that same month to an Armed Forces Bank account jointly held by Levodge Spotson and the defendant. The defendant then allegedly transferred the funds to her own personal checking account.

The complaint additionally charges that the defendant had filed the application in her ex-husband's name using a relative's computer in Queens, where she has been staying since leaving New Orleans.

The investigation leading to today's arrest began when Mr. Spotson notified FEMA that he did not submit an application nor did he receive or withdraw any of the funds sent to him.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Jerome D. Pugh and Richard A. Lewis of the District Attorney's Detective Bureau under the supervision of Sergeant John W. Kenna and Lieutenant Robert J. Burke and the overall supervision of Chief Lawrence J. Festa and Deputy Chief Albert D. Velardi

Assistant District Attorney Joseph G. D'Arrigo, of the District Attorney's Economic and Environmental Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Gregory C. Pavlides, Bureau Chief, and Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

It should be noted that a criminal complaint is merely an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editors: An e-version of this press release is posted on the QDA website at www.queensda.org.