



U.S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

**FORMER BROOKLYN ASSEMBLYWOMAN PLEADS GUILTY
TO MULTIPLE FRAUD SCHEMES AND WITNESS TAMPERING**

***Pamela Harris Admits to Defrauding Government Agencies Out of Tens of Thousands of
Dollars and Tampering with Witnesses***

Earlier today, in federal court in Brooklyn, former New York State Assemblywoman Pamela Harris pleaded guilty to two counts of wire fraud, one count of making false statements to the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), and one count of witness tampering. The proceeding was held before United States Magistrate Judge Robert M. Levy. Harris was arrested on January 9, 2018 and resigned from her position in the New York State Assembly on April 2, 2018.

Richard P. Donoghue, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, William F. Sweeney, Jr., Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI), and Mark G. Peters, Commissioner, New York City Department of Investigation (DOI), announced the guilty plea.

“Elected by the people of her district to serve with honesty and integrity, Pamela Harris defrauded government programs out of tens of thousands of dollars, using the money for her personal benefit,” stated United States Attorney Donoghue. “Harris stole grant money allocated for underprivileged children and young adults and lied to obtain funds set aside for those displaced by Hurricane Sandy, committing these crimes both before and after she was elected to serve in the New York State Assembly. She then compounded her criminal conduct by pressuring witnesses to lie to the FBI. The defendant’s guilty plea today clearly demonstrates that elected officials are not above the law and will be held responsible for their crimes.” U.S. Attorney Donoghue thanked the FBI and DOI for their partnership and work on the case.

“Amid the widespread destruction caused by Hurricane Sandy, former New York State Assemblywoman Pamela Harris sought to devise a destructive scheme of her own,” stated FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Sweeney. “As FEMA dedicated themselves to aid those

affected by the storm, Harris saw this as the perfect opportunity to defraud this agency of tens of thousands of dollars. By defrauding an agency solely dedicated to the assistance of those in need, Harris showed no remorse for the many victims of this storm. Instead, she falsely victimized herself for mere personal gain. In an attempt to obstruct justice, Harris caused greater destruction by coercing individuals to lie to federal agents on her behalf. Despite her unjust acts against the community, Harris's plea shows that justice will prevail in the end."

"This former state assemblywoman, now convicted criminal, defrauded city and federal programs out of tens of thousands of dollars, including pocketing funds designated for victims of Hurricane Sandy's wrath, many of whom were from her district and hit hard during the storm," stated DOI Commissioner Peters. "She continued her corrupt schemes even as she sat in the state capitol, stealing public funds while she feigned to be in the service of her constituents. Elected officials who deceive the public, break the law and steal taxpayer funds will be brought to justice. DOI thanks the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York and the FBI for their partnership in working together to expose and prosecute these crimes."

Between 2012 and 2014, Harris defrauded FEMA out of nearly \$25,000 by falsely claiming that she had been forced out of her storm-damaged residence and into a temporary residence in Staten Island after Hurricane Sandy. To support her claim for Hurricane Sandy funds, she submitted to FEMA fake lease agreements that she had purportedly entered into with the landlord of the Staten Island residence, as well as bogus rent payment receipts. In reality, Harris continued to live at her Coney Island residence and pocketed the FEMA payments.

Between August 2014 and July 2015, Harris, who was at the time the Executive Director of a not-for-profit organization located in Brooklyn, defrauded the New York City Council of \$22,800 in discretionary funding by falsely claiming that the not-for-profit would use the funds to rent a studio space. As part of her scheme, Harris submitted to the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, the government entity responsible for administering and disbursing the City Council's discretionary funds, a forged lease agreement. After the not-for-profit received the funding, Harris diverted the funds to her personal checking account and used the money to pay for personal expenses.

The following year, between approximately July 2015 and January 2017, when Harris was a sitting member of the New York State Assembly, she defrauded the NYC Council by claiming that funds for the not-for-profit would be spent on rental space. After the funds were disbursed to the not-for-profit, Harris diverted an additional \$22,800 for her personal use.

During her guilty plea, Harris admitted that she pressured witnesses to lie to FBI agents conducting the Grand Jury investigation into her fraudulent schemes.

When sentenced, Harris faces a maximum sentence of 30 years' imprisonment on the charge relating to making false statements to FEMA and a maximum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment on each of the wire fraud and witness tampering counts.

The government's case is being handled by the Office's Public Integrity Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Erik Paulsen and Robert Polemeni are in charge of the prosecution.

The Defendant:

PAMELA HARRIS

Age: 57

Brooklyn New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 18-CR-11 (JBW)