



U.S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

**BROOKLYN ASSEMBLYWOMAN INDICTED FOR
MULTIPLE FRAUD SCHEMES AND OBSTRUCTING JUSTICE**

***Pamela Harris Defrauded Government Agencies out of Tens of Thousands of
Dollars and Tampered with Witnesses***

An 11-count indictment was unsealed today in federal court in Brooklyn, New York, charging Pamela Harris, a New York State Assemblywoman representing Bay Ridge, Coney Island, Dyker Heights and other nearby communities, with two counts of wire fraud, one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, four counts of making false statements, two counts of bankruptcy fraud, one count of witness tampering and one count of conspiracy to obstruct justice. Harris's arraignment on the indictment is scheduled for this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Ramon E. Reyes, Jr.

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 charges.

"As alleged in the indictment, the defendant defrauded government agencies out of tens of thousands of dollars in public funds and tried to fraudulently obtain even more," stated United States Attorney Donoghue. "She conducted her schemes victimizing the federal and New York City governments, and then obstructed a federal investigation into her crimes while a sitting New York State Assemblywoman. When she learned that law enforcement was investigating her various fraud schemes, she pressured witnesses to lie to the FBI and cover them up. This Office and our law enforcement partners are committed to ensuring that those who serve the public are held accountable under the law to the same extent as the people they are privileged to serve."

“Both before and during her tenure as a public servant, as alleged, Assemblywoman Pamela Harris went to great lengths to defraud local and federal agencies out of thousands of dollars,” stated FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Sweeney. “In fact, at a time when many residents in her district were dealing with the horrific aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, Harris was busy brewing a storm of her own, one that resulted in her receiving significant payouts by the very federal agency charged with helping those truly in need. As if these allegations weren’t enough, Harris allegedly obstructed a federal investigation into the matters at hand, asking others to lie on her behalf, as alleged. These types of crimes threaten the financial stability of our local and federal governments, but when a public official is involved, even more is at risk. Today we are proud to put an end to this inexcusable scheme.”

“The brazen corruption charged as a result of this investigation tramples on the very definition of a public servant,” stated DOI Commissioner Peters. “This elected official exploited the public she was elected to serve by stealing from City and federal programs and then concealing the fraud with false statements and asking witnesses to obstruct the investigation, according to the indictment. 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 the array of wrongdoing charged in this indictment.”

As alleged in the indictment, between 2012 and 2016, the defendant defrauded various government agencies, including the New York City Council (“NYC Council”), New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (“DYCD”), Federal Emergency Management Agency (“FEMA”), United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”), the New York City Build it Back Program (“NYC Build it Back Program”) and United States Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of New York (“U.S. Bankruptcy Court”).

NYC Council / DYCD Fraud Scheme.

Between August 2014 and July 2015, the defendant, who was at the time the Executive Director of a not-for-profit organization located in Brooklyn, defrauded the NYC Council of nearly \$23,000 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, the defendant submitted to DYCD—the government entity responsible for administering and disbursing the NYC Council’s discretionary funds—a forged lease agreement. Once the not-for-profit received the funding, the defendant 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, the defendant committed a nearly identical scheme—this time as a sitting Assemblywoman. The defendant again defrauded the NYC Council by claiming that funds would be spent on rental space. In fact, when the not-for-profit received the discretionary funding, the defendant diverted the funds—this time, \$11,400—for her personal use.

FEMA Fraud Scheme.

Between 2012 and 2014, the defendant defrauded FEMA out of nearly \$25,000 by falsely claiming to FEMA she had been forced out of her residence by Hurricane Sandy. The defendant represented to FEMA that her Coney Island residence was so damaged by Hurricane

Sandy that she had to move to a temporary residence in Staten Island after the storm. In furtherance of the scheme, the defendant 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, the defendant continued to live at her Coney Island residence and pocketed the FEMA payments for herself.

HUD/Build it Back Fraud Scheme.

In 2016, while she was a sitting New York State Assemblywoman, the defendant repeated the same misrepresentations and submitted the same fake documents to the NYC Build it Back Program in order to obtain additional financial assistance. She also made other false claims in order to persuade Build it Back to pay for substantial construction to her home.

Bankruptcy Fraud Scheme.

In November 2013, the defendant filed for Chapter 13 bankruptcy protection in the United States Bankruptcy Court in Brooklyn. The defendant, who at the time of her filing was receiving \$1,550 each month from FEMA based on the misrepresentations described above, told the Bankruptcy Trustee that she was receiving \$1,200 a month in financial assistance from the same landlord that she told FEMA she was paying \$1,550 a month in rent. Neither statement was true.

Obstruction of Justice and Witness Tampering.

Finally, between March 2017 and May 2017, after the defendant became aware of the grand jury's investigation into her various fraud schemes, she instructed witnesses to lie to FBI agents conducting the grand jury investigation, which the witnesses did.

The charges in the indictment are merely allegations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. If convicted, the defendant faces a maximum sentence of 30 years' imprisonment on one of the charges relating to making false statements to FEMA; a maximum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment on each of the wire fraud conspiracy, wire fraud, witness tampering, or obstruction of justice conspiracy charges; and a maximum sentence of five years of imprisonment on each of the bankruptcy fraud or other false statements charges.

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)