



**PATRICIA R. LYKOS**  
**DISTRICT ATTORNEY**  
**HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS**

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Public Information Office  
Donna Hawkins  
George Flynn  
(713) 755-3320

**Ex-Officer Gets Prison in Major Theft Scheme from Evacuee Youth Program**

Houston, TX – An ex-Houston Police Officer was sentenced to 16 years in prison and fined on her convictions for stealing \$166,400 and attempting to steal more than \$435,000 in a bogus basketball camp scheme for hurricane evacuee children, District Attorney Patricia Lykos announced Friday.

Tracie Denise Bell, 41, had contracted in 2007 with the Houston Area Urban League for American Red Cross funding to put on a summer recreational camp for youngsters displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Prosecutor Jennifer Devine of the District Attorney's Public Integrity Division presented witnesses who said Bell received grant money, and tried to secure more, by submitting fabricated attendance sheets and supporting documentation. That falsely indicated that Bell had conducted a two-week camp at Hoffman Middle School for 330 participants.

A jury sentenced Bell to 16 years in prison and fined her \$6,460 for her conviction on the attempted theft of more than \$200,000. Jurors also convicted her of the theft of more than \$100,000. That verdict resulted in a fine of \$3,300 and 15-year term. The sentences will be served concurrently.

"This verdict sends a strong message to those who would violate the public trust," District Attorney Lykos said. "We will bring you to justice." She applauded the work of the Houston Police Department in the case.

Devine also praised the HPD's Internal Affairs Division and the DA's Public Integrity Division for the investigation.

"The jury was able to get a very clear picture of how she was able to take advantage of this program under the guise of providing much-needed services to children who had next to nothing," Devine said. "Jurors were extremely attentive and conscientious. They held Bell accountable for her unlawful conduct because the evidence demanded it."

Bell's 11-day trial concluded Wednesday in the 178<sup>th</sup> District Court of Judge David Mendoza. Trial is pending for a second former Houston Police Officer accused in the scheme. She is Kirshondra K. Richardson, 28. The two are no longer with the Houston Police Department. (end)

