



PRESS RELEASE

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Statement of Ocean County Prosecutor Marlene Lynch Ford On Prosecution of Storm Related Crimes

Ocean County Prosecutor Marlene Lynch Ford released the following statement today with regard to the investigation and prosecution of storm related crimes in Ocean County:

"In the wake of this unprecedeted natural disaster, law enforcement and emergency services personnel should be concentrating on the recovery and rebuilding effort, to restore the Jersey Shore to its rightful position as our home and the second home or vacation destination to so many people.

Unfortunately there will always be a number of people who, rather than making this event a time to offer help to alleviate human suffering, see this tragedy through the lens of the career criminal: an opportunity to steal, to exploit and to endanger the public.

As a result I am establishing the Ocean County Prosecutor's Office Hurricane Sandy Task Force, which will assist local departments in the investigation and prosecution of crimes that are related to the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. Sr. Assistant Prosecutor Martin Anton will be designated as Task Force Coordinator and contact person for the Task Force. He can be reached at (732) 929-2027.

People who feel they have been the victim of a crime related to the aftermath of the storm are encouraged to report that to their local police department or to the Office of the Ocean County Prosecutor. They should not under any circumstances try to confront someone they suspect of criminal activity, or to otherwise place themselves in a position where their safety is compromised.

With regard to people accused of committing looting, scams, and other storm related crimes against persons and property, I have instructed my assistant prosecutors to consider as an aggravating factor in charging and bail recommendations that these crimes are occurring to people rendered particularly vulnerable by an unprecedeted

natural disaster. I am instructing my prosecutors to use the existing criminal code to its fullest extent to prosecute offenders in this category.

This disaster presents significant issues to law enforcement and to the administration of criminal justice. There are significant issues of public safety uniquely related to the events of the past week. I believe the totality of these circumstances warrant deviation from our usual policy of not releasing the arrest photographs of offenders.

Commencing immediately, I have instructed local police departments that with regard to people accused of storm related offenses, upon request of the media, arrest photographs may be released.

I am authorizing this action for important public policy reasons.

First of all, identification of the defendant may reveal other criminal conduct and will promote the safety of the general public.

Second, it appears that many of these criminal acts associated with the natural disaster are part of a pattern of organized conduct, with multiple victims. The victims of these crimes may be able to provide important information to police, yet they are not even aware they have been victimized, given the fact that mandatory evacuation orders are in effect, for example, on the Barnegat Peninsula or on Long Beach Island. The victims of these crimes do not have immediate access to their homes. This is a unique situation which again tips the balance in favor of the rights of victims of crime.

Third, we are concerned that in the aftermath of this disaster, contractor fraud and scams will victimize the community, especially people desperate to return to a state of normalcy. Contractors may use multiple identities, both personal as well as corporate. Mere publication of the name of a defendant will not give adequate notice to the public who are other crime victims. I am also concerned that individuals accused of these crimes and released on bail may adopt other personal or corporate identities in their effort to perpetrate scams or other crimes

All of these reasons justify a departure from the normal policy on the release of the arrest photos of people associated with storm related crimes only.

The defendant continues to have the benefit of a presumption of innocence. The mere accusation of a crime does not change that, and the publication of the arrest photo in these instances is within the normal range of exception, under the guidelines promulgated by the Office of the Attorney General.

. Due to the nature and extent of the devastation to property, as well as the limited ability of police to respond to every report of criminal activity, it is important for the safety of the public that we all be cognizant of individuals who are exploiting this disaster for criminal purposes. We are also concerned that there are other victims of the same defendant who will come forward if aware of the charges against this individual. Identification of these individuals, who make a living from exploiting natural disasters, is critical in the investigation, arrest and prosecution process.

As we move forward in our effort as a community to recover from the effects of Hurricane Sandy, experience unfortunately teaches us some contractors will attempt to exploit this tragedy for criminal purposes. Be aware of contractors who are not registered with the State of New Jersey. Verify they are registered by checking the website of the NJ Division of Consumer Affairs, which can be found at the State of NJ website, www.nj.gov, or call the Ocean County Department of Consumer Affairs at (732) 929-2105. Be wary as well of contractors who provide estimates for a fee, and then disappear never to be seen again, a common scam following natural disasters.”

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