



United States Department of Justice

Offices of the United States Attorneys

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
EASTERN DISTRICT *of* ARKANSAS

[U.S. Attorneys](#) » [Eastern District of Arkansas](#) » [News](#)

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Arkansas

SHARE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, September 21, 2017

Woman Sent to Prison for Scheme to Steal USDA Funds Intended to Feed Hungry Children

LITTLE ROCK—Patrick C. Harris, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, announced Thursday that United States District Court Judge James M. Moody, Jr., sentenced Francine Leon, 49, of Wheatley, to prison for her role in a scheme to steal money intended for feeding children in low income areas.

Judge Moody sentenced Leon, who pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit wire fraud on February 25, 2016, to 34 months' imprisonment, to be followed by one year of supervised release. She was also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$1,003,630.00.

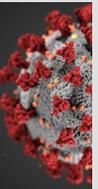
The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) feeding programs in Arkansas are administered through the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS). Sponsors who want to participate in the feeding programs must submit an application to DHS for approval. After they are approved, they can provide meals as part of the feeding programs, and they are reimbursed for the eligible meals they serve.

Leon is the tenth defendant to be sentenced for her involvement in a scheme to fraudulently obtain USDA program funds intended to feed children in low income areas. Other defendants sentenced include: Kattie Jordan, 63 months' imprisonment on March 15, 2016; Reuben Nims, 21 months' imprisonment on November 2, 2016; Tonique Hatton, 108 months' imprisonment on January 4, 2017; James Franklin, 24 months' imprisonment on January 10, 2017; Maria Nelson, 30 months' imprisonment on January 31, 2017; Michael Lee, 30 months' imprisonment on May 1, 2017; Christopher Nichols, 3 years' probation on May 16,



REPORT COVID-19 CRIME

Contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline:
866-720-5721 or
Justice.gov/DisasterComplaintForm



Our nation-wide commitment to reducing gun crime in America.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Help us combat the proliferation of sexual exploitation crimes against children.

[LEARN MORE](#)

2017; Alexis Young, 18 months' imprisonment on August 18, 2017; and Erica Warren, 18 months' imprisonment on August 18, 2017.

Waymon Weeams and Dortha Harper have pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud USDA feeding programs and are awaiting sentencing. Jacqueline Mills and Anthony Waits were convicted on April 6, 2017, following a jury trial and are also awaiting sentencing.

Leon operated as a sponsor for a feeding program through an organization called "Brighter Kids, Brighter Futures." At times during the period charged in the Information, Leon had approved sites in Cotton Plant, Wheatley, Poplar Grove, Morrilton, Brinkley and West Helena. In the 2012, 2013, and 2014 contract years, claims, which had inflated numbers of children fed, were submitted to DHS for reimbursement. Leon received a total of approximately \$1,003,630. Leon withdrew approximately \$534,710 in cash and paid a portion to two DHS employees.

The investigation is ongoing and is being conducted by the USDA–Office of Inspector General, Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Internal Revenue Service–Criminal Investigations. If you are aware of any fraudulent activity regarding feeding programs, please email that information to USAARE.FeedingProgramFraud@usdoj.gov.

###

Topic(s):
Public Corruption

Component(s):
USAO - Arkansas, Eastern

Updated September 22, 2017

**LAW ENFORCEMENT
COORDINATING
COMMITTEE**

Training and seminars for Federal, State, and Local Law Enforcement Agencies.

[LEARN MORE](#)

**Victim Witness
Assistance**

Learn about victim notification and rights, witness information, and helpful resources.

[LEARN MORE](#)

OFICINAS DE LOS FISCALES DE
LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS
EN ESPAÑOL

- HOME
- ABOUT
- NEWS
- MEET THE U.S. ATTORNEY
- PROGRAMS
 - Law Enforcement Coordinating Committee (LECC)
 - Project Safe Childhood
 - Project Safe Neighborhoods
 - Anti-Terrorism Advisory Council (ATAC)
- VICTIM WITNESS
 - Victims' Rights Information For Victims In Large Cases
 - Crime Victims' Rights Ombudsman
 - Resources
 - Restitution
 - Witness Information
 - Justice 101
 - Frequently Asked Questions
- CONTACT US

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

- Accessibility [Justice.gov](#)
- FOIA [USA.gov](#)
- Privacy Policy
- Legal Policies & Disclaimers