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## **AVOYELLES PARISH SHERIFF WILLIAM BELT AND OTHERS INDICTED BY FEDERAL GRAND JURY**

*Indictment alleges Sheriff Belt illegally pocketed profits  
from phone services provided at parish jails*

**Shreveport, Louisiana** . . .Avoyelles Parish Sheriff **WILLIAM O. BELT** has been indicted for illegally pocketing the profits from the telephone services provided at jails operated by the Sheriff's Office, United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced today. **BELT**, age 56, and his wife, **TRACY BRYANT BELT**, age 37, both of Marksville, Louisiana, were indicted on eight counts of mail fraud along with conspiracy to commit mail fraud. **JULIE ANN BERNARD**, age 50, also of Marksville, was named in the indictment and charged with one count of making a false statement to the FBI and one count of obstruction of justice.

The 12-count indictment alleges that beginning in 1988 and continuing to the present, Sheriff **BELT** and his wife were involved in a scheme to defraud the citizens of Avoyelles Parish of the honest and faithful services of their Sheriff. Specifically, the primary object of the conspiracy was to promote and then cover up the receipt of some of the profits from the operation of phone services provided at Avoyelles Parish jails. The indictment alleges that in exchange for his authorizing the operation of phone services by certain

vendors, Sheriff BELT, other family members, and businesses in which the Sheriff had an ownership interest, all received proceeds from those services.

The indictment further alleges that JULIE ANN BERNARD obstructed the federal grand jury investigation into this matter when she falsely stated that she had minimal involvement with a company called Cajun Callers and no memory of signing checks on its behalf, when she well knew that she had been issuing checks for the company for over a year and a half, and made a false statement to the same effect to an FBI agent.

Sheriff BELT and his wife, if convicted, face a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both, on each charge of mail fraud, and 5 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both, on the charge of conspiracy. JULIE ANN BERNARD, if convicted, faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both, on the charge of obstruction of justice, and a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both, on the charge of making a false statement to the FBI.

U.S. Attorney Washington stated: “This indictment alleges that Sheriff Belt deprived the citizens of Avoyelles Parish of the honest and faithful services of their Sheriff. This office will aggressively pursue investigations and prosecutions of matters involving a breach of the public’s trust by elected officials and government employees. Anyone having evidence demonstrating the misuse, theft, or misappropriation of public funds, property or services should contact my office or the FBI.”

James Bernazzani, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI in Louisiana, added: “The FBI has been clear that any individual, whether they be federal, state or local, whether they be elected, appointed or hired, who misuses their position for profit, will be vigorously investigated and brought to justice. The FBI, with our law enforcement partners, namely the IRS in this investigation, are fundamentally committed to work day and night to ensure that the people of Louisiana get the honest and faithful service of their officials.”

An indictment is merely an accusation and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. Defendants are entitled to a presumption of innocence under the law, and the government has the burden of proving every element of the charges beyond a reasonable doubt.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Alexandria Resident Agency, and the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation, and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Joseph G. Jarzabek.

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