

CIVIL DISTRICT COURT FOR THE PARISH OF ORLEANS

STATE OF LOUISIANA

NO: 2015-8284

DIVISION: B-12

STATE OF LOUISIANA-DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATION,
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,
DISASTER RECOVERY UNIT –
HAZARD MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM

VS.

THOMAS LEWIS AND MARY BELL LEWIS

**PETITION FOR DECLARATORY JUDGMENT AND FOR
JUDGMENT TO RECOVER HAZARD MITIGATION
GRANT PROGRAM FUNDS**

NOW INTO COURT, through undersigned counsel, comes Petitioner, the State of Louisiana, Office of Community Development, Disaster Recovery Unit - Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (hereinafter "HMGP"), which respectfully files this Petition for Declaratory Judgment and for Judgment to Recover Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Funds. In support, HMGP respectfully represents:

1.

The Defendants in this case are Thomas Lewis and Mary Bell Lewis, majors domiciled in Orleans Parish, who voluntarily participated in HMGP to mitigate their home after Hurricane Katrina.

2.

HMGP is a mitigation program funded by FEMA and is administered by the State of Louisiana, the grantee. HMGP assists homeowners whose homes were damaged as a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. It also helps homeowners in coastal Louisiana protect their homes from damage which may occur in future natural disasters by elevating their homes, reconstructing safer structures, or installing individual mitigation measures. The State of Louisiana serves as the funding vehicle by which FEMA funds are awarded to eligible homeowners.

3.

Defendants, Thomas Lewis and Mary Bell Lewis, executed a Voluntary Participation Agreement (hereinafter "VPA") on April 01, 2010 to participate in HMGP and to receive an HMGP grant. Defendants also agreed to comply with all HMGP guidelines, which include using HMGP funds for their intended purpose.

4.

FEMA grant funds in the amount of \$32,590.00 (hereinafter "FEMA grant funds") were paid to Defendants by HMGP on or about January 12, 2011 for the specific purpose of Elevation Measures (hereinafter "Elevation") to their home located at 2033 Lawrence St., New Orleans, Louisiana 70114.

5.

Photographs dated March 24, 2015 show that although the FEMA grant funds were received, Defendants' home was not elevated.

6.

Collection letters were mailed to Defendants.

7.

Defendants have failed to respond to the letters and have failed to return the funds to the State.

8.

Defendants' failure to return the FEMA grant funds has resulted in Defendants owing to HMGP the unearned federal funds, which must be recovered by HMGP, the State program charged with distributing FEMA funds for mitigation projects.

9.

HMGP must account to FEMA for all funds issued to homeowners. Failure of HMGP to recover the FEMA grant funds from Defendants will result in reimbursement to FEMA by the State of Louisiana.

10.

HMGP requests that the debt of \$32,590.00 owed by Thomas Lewis and Mary Bell Lewis to HMGP be recognized and that judgment in favor of HMGP be granted, directing Defendants to return and pay the FEMA grant funds to the State, in full.

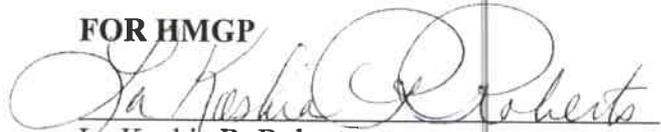
ALL PREMISES CONSIDERED, WHEREFORE, HMGP PRAYS:

- a. That this Honorable Court declare that Defendants, Thomas Lewis and Mary Bell Lewis, are non-compliant with the Voluntary Participation Agreement signed by them;
- b. That this Honorable Court declare that Defendants, Thomas Lewis and Mary Bell Lewis, are indebted to HMGP in the amount of \$32,590.00 because of their failure to elevate their home according to their agreement to abide by HMGP guidelines, including using HMGP funds for their intended purpose;
- c. That Defendants, Thomas Lewis and Mary Bell Lewis, be ordered to return the \$32,590.00 HMGP grant to HMGP, in full;

- d. That there be judgment rendered herein in favor of HMGP and against Defendants, Thomas Lewis and Mary Bell Lewis, in the full sum \$32,590.00;
- e. That Defendants, Thomas Lewis and Mary Bell Lewis, be assessed all costs and fees associated with this matter; and
- f. That the Court grant such other relief as is just and proper.

Respectfully submitted:

FOR HMGP



La Koshia R. Roberts
Bar Roll No. 26715
State of Louisiana, through
its Division of Administration
2021 Lakeshore Drive, Suite 100
New Orleans, Louisiana 70122
Telephone: 504-284-4022
Facsimile: 504-284-4091
LaKoshia.Roberts@la.gov

**PUBLIC ENTITY/FEE EXEMPT
(La.R.S. 13:4521 and 13:5112)**

T. Randolph Richardson (Special Counsel)
Bar Roll No. 11245
Law Office of T. Randolph Richardson
1010 Common Street, Suite 3000
New Orleans, Louisiana 70112
Telephone: 504-212-4163
Facsimile: 504-581-7083
trichar994@aol.com

PLEASE SERVE:

**THOMAS LEWIS
2033 LAWRENCE ST.
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70114**

**MARY BELL LEWIS
2033 LAWRENCE ST.
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70114**

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VERIFICATION

CONSIDERING THE FOREGOING PETITION FOR RECOVERY OF HAZARD
MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM FUNDS:

I, CRAIG P. TAFFARO, JR., Director of the State of Louisiana's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, declare under penalty of perjury that the representations made in the foregoing Petition are true and correct to the best of my knowledge, belief and understanding.

THUS DONE ON THIS 25th DAY OF August 2015 IN NEW ORLEANS,
LOUISIANA.



Craig P. Taffaro, Jr.



La Koshia Reconda Roberts
Notary Public
Bar Roll No. 26715
My Commission expires at death.