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## **Attorney General Steve Marshall, Lee County DA Brandon Hughes, Sheriff Jay Jones Join with Home Builders Licensure Board to Warn Against Home Repair Fraud Following Storm Damage**

(MONTGOMERY) – As Lee County and other parts of Alabama are struggling to recover from the devastating storms that struck on March 3, affected residents continue the hard work of clearing debris and repairing damage to homes and other structures. Attorney General Steve Marshall, Lee County District Attorney Brandon Hughes, Sheriff Jay Jones and other local officials, today joined with the Alabama Home Builders Licensure Board at a news conference to warn against fraudulent practices and advise how consumers may better protect themselves. The tornadoes and storms caused damage extensively throughout the southeast region of Alabama, including in Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Crenshaw, Geneva, Henry, Lee, Macon and Washington counties.

“The good people of Alabama are strong and determined, and we come together in times of crisis such as this,” said Attorney General Steve Marshall. “In the devastation left by these storms, there is rebuilding to be done. As we move forward, it is important that consumers are mindful that unscrupulous people may seek to take advantage of their misfortune. To those who have suffered damage, we urge you to take precautions for your protection, and to those who would take advantage of this disaster, we warn that home repair fraud is a serious crime that will not be tolerated.”

Lee County District Attorney Brandon Hughes warned, “Protecting our citizens from nefarious opportunists during this difficult time is of the utmost importance to me and my office. To anyone who views this tragedy as your chance to come into our community and commit any manner of scam or fraudulent activity, you should be forewarned that we are keeping a vigilant watch and stand ready to prosecute you.”

“Our goal is to prevent anyone that has the intent to profit by taking advantage of the people in our community who have suffered the loss of loved ones and property,” said Sheriff Jay Jones. “We will be on alert for any reports of fraud committed under the guise of home and structure repair services. The Sheriff’s office is dedicated to protecting our community from unscrupulous conduct during the recovery process.”

Home Builders Licensure Board Executive Director Chip Carden cautioned homeowners who experienced damage, and emphasized the importance of the consumer knowing about the potential problems of contracting for homebuilding and remodeling jobs with unlicensed contractors. “Do your homework,” Carden advised. “Call any references the builder gives you and check with the Board to confirm if a builder is licensed and in good standing. Don’t be in a rush. A bad decision now can make a difficult decision even worse.”



The Home Builders Licensure Board regulates and licenses homebuilders and remodelers, and maintains an official list of those who are licensed for consumers to check before hiring someone. This state license is required for jobs costing more than \$10,000, but consumers are urged to seek licensees even if the scope of the work is less than that. Plumbers, HVAC contractors and electricians must be licensed by the state regardless of the cost of work. There also may be local permitting and license requirements, so check with local city or county government.

It is recommended that consumers take the following precautions when hiring a builder or someone to make home repairs:

- Ask if they are licensed. Ask to see the card! The HBLB license is credit card-sized license - a sample is listed on HBLB's website. You may check on a builder's license status by calling 1-800-304-0853, or by visiting [www.hblb.alabama.gov](http://www.hblb.alabama.gov).
- Ask for and check references, especially if the builder makes unsolicited contact with you or is from out-of-town. Get names and addresses, and call them.
- Obtain several written estimates. Beware of estimates that are well below the market price or seem "too good to be true."
- Make sure quotes and contracts are in writing. Under state law, licensed homebuilders must use a written contract. Make sure it includes the contractor's full name, address, telephone number, a description of the work to be performed, starting and estimated completion dates, and the total cost of the job.
- Ask for proof of insurance, including workers compensation and general liability.
- NEVER make a full payment or substantial down payment up front. Do not make a final payment until you are satisfied and all subcontractors have been paid. If they tell you that more money is needed in advance, be wary.
- Ask if this particular job requires a permit and contact your local city and county government to see if a permit is required. Do not let them talk you into applying for a homeowner's permit. If they do not want to be known to local officials, they may be hiding a bad reputation.
- Make sure you can contact them. Be certain to get an office number and a cell phone number, and a physical address. Businesses with established addresses may be safer.

Attorney General Marshall urges consumers and officials to report any problems of alleged fraud or scams to his consumer protection office by calling toll-free 1-800-392-5658, by writing to 501 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama, 36130, or through the Attorney General's main web page at [www.ago.alabama.gov](http://www.ago.alabama.gov).

District Attorney Hughes asks that anyone wishing to report fraudulent activity call his office at 334-737-3446.

For information contact the Home Builders Licensure Board, 445 Herron Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36104, (334) 242-2230 or 1-800-304-0853 or [www.hblb.alabama.gov](http://www.hblb.alabama.gov).