

Woman charged with taking church aid for tornado victims

by [Lori Stabile](#)

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PALMER, Mass. (RNS) A Massachusetts woman charged with larceny and fraud denied Tuesday (June 7) that she stole donated items from a church that were intended for victims of a devastating tornado.

Christine Lajewski, 47, of Ware, Mass., was charged with larceny over \$250 under false pretenses and fraud at her arraignment on Tuesday. Police in Monson, where the June 1 tornado unleashed its lethal fury, said Lajewski told volunteers at First Church of Monson that her home and car were destroyed by the tornado in downtown Monson.

But Lajewski's court-appointed lawyer, Holly Battige, said Lajewski told her she went to the church to volunteer, and to collect items for a friend's sister from Monson.

Monson Detective Kristen Marciniac said after Lajewski told her story, the church volunteers immediately loaded her car with \$700 to \$800 worth of items -- baby formula and clothes, a \$200 freezer, food, paper products, toys, stuffed animals and a gazebo tent.

"She took several trips, in her own vehicle," Marciniac said.

Marciniac said Lajewski kept some of the items for herself, while others were given to friends.

A judge released Lajewski on her own recognizance, but said she must stay out of Monson, remain drug free and not commit any crimes.

Prosecutor Mary Partyka said a friend of Lajewski's contacted authorities after she was told what Lajewski allegedly did in Monson.

Partyka said Lajewski had "bragged" about what she had done, and the friend was "disgusted."