



FORMER ESCAMBIA WORTHLESS CHECK COORDINATOR SENTENCED FOR ETHICS VIOLATION AND FORGERY

(MONTGOMERY) – A former worthless check coordinator for the Escambia County District Attorney’s office was sentenced yesterday for felony ethics and second-degree forgery convictions. Monica Lynn Watson pleaded guilty on April 16, just before her trial was set to begin.

For each of the two counts, Watson was sentenced concurrently to six years. Her sentence was split to serve 24 months which will follow a six-month probationary period. She was also ordered to perform 300 hours of community service and to pay a fine of \$1,500 along with the costs of court. A review hearing is scheduled for November 13.

Watson pleaded guilty to the intentional misuse of her public position for unlawful personal gain through the mishandling of funds in the worthless check unit and to second-degree forgery of a motion that purported to be signed by the District Attorney for the dismissal of a case against a defendant.

“This case involves extensive documentation from the Examiners of Public Accounts of misuse of funds totaling \$10, 259,” said Attorney General Strange. “It is important that this defendant is being held to account and punished for her crimes for betraying the public trust and abusing government funds.”

Charges against Watson arose from information in an audit of the Escambia County District Attorney’s Office conducted in 2008 by the Examiners of Public Accounts, covering the period of September 1, 2006, to May 31, 2008. Discrepancies in funds of the Worthless Check Unit (WCU) led to further inquiries, which uncovered money that had been received by the District Attorney’s Office but not receipted in the WCU. It was discovered that two money orders had been deposited into Watson’s credit union account. Furthermore, there was no record in WCU records for certain people who had paid cash to and had handwritten receipts from Watson, but the receipts were logged in under someone else’s name. The Examiners’ audit also cites Watson for filing motions to dismiss cases saying that those defendants had paid all money they owed when they had not, and that the motions were stamped with the District Attorney’s signature. According to the audit, \$10, 259 was stolen from the WCU, which Watson initially refused to repay but later did so.

Attorney General Strange commended those who handled this case, noting in particular Assistant Attorneys General Bill Lisenby and Stephanie Billingslea and Paralegal Lori Arnold of his Public Corruption and White Collar Crime Division, and Special Agents of the Attorney General’s Investigations Division. He thanked the Examiners of Public Accounts and the Escambia County District Attorney’s Office for valuable assistance.

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