



State of Tennessee

Justin P. Wilson, State Comptroller

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Audit Reveals Theft, Misconduct and Other Issues in Lauderdale County

A Lauderdale County deputy sheriff repeatedly spent undercover funds for unauthorized purposes and falsified documents to cover his tracks, a report by the Comptroller's Division of County Audit has found.

The same deputy, Jason Winchester, used his county cell phone for personal business and overstated the amount of compensatory time he had earned. Winchester's actions resulted in a cash shortage of more than \$4,000, although the total could have been higher because the records of undercover fund expenditures were falsified.

As a result of the investigation by the Comptroller's office and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Winchester was fired last year and later indicted on charges including official misconduct, theft of property, tampering with governmental records, forgery, fabricating evidence and misrepresenting information to a state auditor.

The audit, which was released today, can be found online at <http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/ca/CountyAudits.asp?C=49>.

In all, the audit had 11 findings and recommendations for improvement. Several of the findings highlighted issues that were identified in previous audits, but never properly addressed.

For example, expenditures for the Office of Director of Schools exceeded the office's approved budget by almost \$150,000 because officials failed to properly account for costs related to school renovation contracts.

Also, the Offices of the Highway Commissioner and Director of Schools had accounting records that were incorrect and had to be adjusted at the end of the fiscal year.

Some non-governmental employees, including lawyers and title researchers, were given keys to the Office of the Register and allowed unsupervised access to the office after business hours.

And the Office of the Trustee did not have adequate safeguards in place to protect its information resources.

“I applaud our investigators and those from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation for their work in uncovering the activities that led to the firing and indictment of the sheriff’s deputy,” Comptroller Justin P. Wilson said. “However, this audit raises a number of other areas of concern. It is troubling to me that issues identified in previous audits have not been addressed. When that happens, I think it’s fair for the taxpayers of Lauderdale County to wonder why reasonable steps aren’t being taken to help safeguard public dollars.”

To report suspected cases of fraud, waste or abuse of taxpayer dollars, call the Comptroller’s hotline at 1-800-232-5454.

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Media contact: Blake Fontenay, Communications Director, (615) 253-2668 or blake.fontenay@tn.gov