



**Justin P. Wilson, Comptroller**

August 16, 2019

## **Hamblen County Trustee Indicted on Multiple Counts Including Theft**

An investigation by the Tennessee Comptroller's Office, working in conjunction with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, has resulted in the indictment of John Baskette, the current trustee of Hamblen County.

Investigators determined that Baskette withheld \$89,478.81 in cash that was collected by the trustee's office between November 5, 2018 and December 8, 2018. Baskette admitted that he hid the undeposited cash in various locations in his office because he feared carrying large amounts of cash alone to the bank for deposit.

About a month after the Comptroller's Office began its investigation, Baskette deposited all of the missing money in the county's account. However, the investigation revealed that Baskette also withdrew \$88,520 from his personal bank accounts in the days prior to depositing the missing cash in the county's account.

The investigation found that Baskette was in debt to several individuals for equipment sales, cattle sales, and personal sales. Many of these individuals stated Baskette requested transactions be done in cash.



After depositing the missing money in January 2019, Baskette and a family member opened a joint checking account with a \$450 check from the family member on February 4. The family member then obtained a loan for \$89,000 and placed the loan proceeds into the joint account. Baskette used the loan proceeds to pay his debts to three individuals via certified checks. The \$89,450 Baskette received from his family member was nearly the same amount of cash he withheld from the trustee's office collections.

It should also be noted that Baskette, who is responsible for collecting property tax payments in Hamblen County, had still not paid the \$1,285 that he owed the county for his own 2018 property taxes as of June 30, 2019.

On August 15, 2019, John Baskette was indicted by the Hamblen County Grand Jury. The indictments included 40 counts of failure to deposit public funds, two counts of official misconduct, one count of destruction of government records, one count of theft over \$60,000, and one count of worthless check over \$1,000.

"County offices have a responsibility to establish and follow rules that ensure taxpayer money is protected," said Comptroller Justin P. Wilson. "This case underscores the importance of depositing all money received within three days of collection and performing timely and routine bank reconciliations."

To view the investigative report, go to: <https://comptroller.tn.gov/office-functions/investigations/find.html>

If you suspect fraud, waste or abuse of public money in Tennessee, call the Comptroller's toll-free hotline at

800.232.5454, or file a report online at: [www.comptroller.tn.gov/hotline](http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/hotline). Follow us on twitter: [@TNCOT](https://twitter.com/TNCOT)

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