

Alleged Fraudulent Vehicle Lien Removal by Former Employee of the Franklin County Treasurer's Office

State Auditor Mike Foley's office has issued a letter to the Board of Supervisors of Franklin County detailing findings arising from an audit of that political subdivision's financial statements for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022.

The letter focuses largely upon the suspected malfeasance of a former employee of the Franklin County Treasurer's (Treasurer) office, Ms. Tammy Biesecker. According to the letter, Ms. Biesecker appears to have abused her authority in the Treasurer's office by improperly removing a lien from a vehicle owned by her son's girlfriend.

While examining the Treasurer's records, Auditor Foley's staff discovered that, on April 20, 2022, Ms. Biesecker issued a new title for a 2005 Jeep Grand Cherokee owned by Courtney Yockey, removing the existing lien in the process. In addition to living in Buffalo County, some 50 miles north of Franklin County, Ms. Yockey was dating Ms. Biesecker's son, David Robert Smith. Her vehicle, which received the "clean" title from Ms. Biesecker, was purchased, titled, registered, and kept in Buffalo County – raising the question as to why Ms. Yockey would seek title assistance in distant Franklin County.

In an effort to support her actions, Ms. Biesecker produced a supposed lien release authorization letter from American Auto Exchange, Inc., the lienholder on Ms. Yockey's vehicle. However, Auditor Foley's staff noted a number of irregularities in that document, including: 1) lack of a date; 2) the missing city, state, and zip code after Ms. Yockey's street address; 3) the absence of any punctuation; 4) a completely illegible signature coupled with no printed name or title for the authorized representative of the lienholder; and 5) the failure to notarize the letter.

Additionally, Ms. Biesecker claimed to have received the release authorization letter by mail; however, the auditors noted that it contained no creases from being folded and placed in an envelope. More incredibly yet, the words "Sent from my iPhone" were printed clearly on the bottom of the document.

Ms. Biesecker's apparently fraudulent actions in removing the lien from Ms. Yockey's vehicle without the proper authorization came to light on June 21, 2022, when the Treasurer's office received a telephone call from American Auto Exchange, Inc., asking why that valid lien had been removed. When American Auto Exchange, Inc., attempted to repossess the vehicle, the caller explained, the Buffalo County Treasurer said that the lien no longer existed. Auditor Foley's office verified this information during a subsequent telephone call to American Auto Exchange, Inc.

After learning that the lien removed by Ms. Biesecker was, in fact, still in force, the Treasurer and the State Department of Motor Vehicles sent three separate letters to Ms. Yockey, explaining that she was in possession of a deficient vehicle title and needed to have it replaced with a proper title reflecting the ongoing lien. Due to her unresponsiveness, however, the title and registration for Ms. Yockey's vehicle was cancelled on August 16, 2022.

As well as leading to other related concerns addressed in Auditor Foley's letter – including the admitted use of fictitious license plates on Ms. Yockey's vehicle and the suspected evasion of sales taxes during prior transfers of another automobile owned by Ms. Yockey – Ms. Biesecker's alleged unauthorized removal of the lien gives rise to serious concerns regarding possible violations of various State laws.

Ms. Biesecker's employment with the Treasurer's office was terminated on June 13, 2022, approximately a week before the telephone call from American Auto Exchange, Inc., revealed the suspect lien removal. Nevertheless, as noted in Auditor Foley's letter, the information contained therein regarding her questionable activity has been forwarded to the appropriate State authorities for further review.