



LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
DARYL G. PURPERA, CPA, CFE

January 12, 2015

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE, 42ND JUDICIAL DISTRICT

A long-term employee of the district attorney's office for the 42nd Judicial District in DeSoto Parish allegedly cashed 580 money orders totaling more than \$136,000 payable to, or intended for, the DA's office, and utilized the money for "her own personal use" during the past decade, according to a report released Monday by Legislative Auditor Daryl Purpera.

The investigative audit said that Melanie Barber, who began working in 2002, was terminated in March 2014, when she was coordinator of the "worthless checks" program. As part of her job, the report said, Barber sometimes picked up mail at a post office, collected payments for the worthless checks and pre-trial diversion programs, and maintained case files.

Auditors said Barber cashed some of the money orders at the DeSoto Parish Sheriff's Office and "several local banks and retailers." After receiving information that Barber was cashing a large number of money orders, the DA asked the Mansfield Police Department to investigate. The prosecutor's office is based in Mansfield, the DeSoto Parish seat.

The audit said Barber told police that while working at the office "she took money orders payable to the 42nd DA's office" and cashed some of them at the sheriff's office, taking the money for her own personal use. She also said that "some money orders had probably been brought into the DA's office blank," and she filled them out to indicate it "was payable to her from her niece."

The audit said that from July 2005 through January 2014, Barber cashed 206 money orders totaling \$49,733 at the sheriff's office. Investigators said an additional 52 money orders – worth more than \$20,400 and payable to the DA's office – were cashed at local banks and retailers.

From 2004 to 2014, Barber cashed another 310 money orders made payable to her, totaling \$62,055. The report said the DA's office matched 47 of the money orders for \$7,856 to its case files, based on the information in the "paid from" section of the instrument.

In an interview with the Mansfield police, Barber said that "she would fill out blank money orders and make them payable to herself." She also would tell people who came to the prosecutor's office to "leave the money orders blank and she would fill them out for them."

The remaining 263 money orders payable to Barber, totaling \$54,199, were cashed at local retailers or through her bank accounts and "could not be associated with an existing case" in the DA's files, according to the report. However, the names of two of Barber's family members and



LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
DARYL G. PURPERA, CPA, CFE

a friend were written on 206 money orders “indicating they were from them,” but police interviews of the three indicated they “never gave Ms. Barber any money orders.”

Seven of the 12 other money orders cashed by Barber were made payable to a family member; two were to a local retailer; and three were illegible. “Ms. Barber’s family member was not aware of the seven money orders payable to him” and the prosecutor was able to match five of the seven to case files, the state auditor’s report said.

The state auditor has forwarded the report to the district attorney’s office, the state attorney general’s office and the U.S. Attorney’s office for the Western District of Louisiana.

For more information, contact:

Daryl G. Purpera, CPA, CFE
Legislative Auditor
225-339-3800

On Twitter: Longtime 42nd district attorney employee cashed nearly 600 money orders for herself over span of decade.