



KELLER J. BLACKBURN
Athens County Prosecuting Attorney

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From: Keller J. Blackburn, Athens County Prosecuting Attorney
Phone #: 740-592-3208
www.athenscountyprosecutor.org

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**Former Nelsonville deputy auditor sentenced to nearly five years in prison,
ordered to pay more than \$200K restitution**

ATHENS, Ohio – Stephanie Wilson, 47 of Stewart, was sentenced Monday in Athens County Common Pleas Court to four years and 11 months in prison and ordered to pay more than \$200K in total restitution to the city of Nelsonville.

Wilson previously pleaded guilty to charges of tampering with records (F4), forgery (F4), telecommunications fraud (F3) and theft in office (F3). The counts were related to funds Wilson stole from the City of Nelsonville while she served as deputy auditor.

After that plea and prior to Monday's sentencing, Wilson was indicted on additional charges from that activity including engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity, a second-degree felony, and theft in office, a third-degree felony. She pleaded not guilty and was placed under a \$2.5 million bond. That case is still pending.

Judge George McCarthy merged the telecommunications fraud and theft in office charges and sentenced Wilson to three years in prison. He ordered 17 months on tampering with records and six months for forgery. The sentences were ordered to run consecutive for a total of four years and 11 months. State law indicates that Wilson will be eligible to apply for judicial release after six months. A five-year prison sentence would have prohibited that action until four years had been served.

Athens County Prosecutor Keller Blackburn asked the court for Wilson to be sentenced to six years in prison. He cited Wilson's betrayal of trust placed in her by the City of Nelsonville, her creation of fake person(s) and using her son's account to embezzle funds, the seriousness of the offenses, the impact on a financially strapped city and her lack of remorse.

Blackburn requested Wilson be liable in the amount of \$113,680.97 for money stolen through fake accounts and \$100,237.34 for overpayments to herself for a total restitution amount of \$213,918.31. Blackburn also asked she pay for the city's bill from the State Auditor's Office in the case for \$27,921.

"This is a serious theft offense. (Wilson) has been doing this for more than four years. This was a conscious decision each time payroll was processed to steal money from the City of Nelsonville ... Nelsonville could have done a lot with that \$213,000 dollars," Blackburn said in court Monday.

Current Nelsonville City Auditor Taylor Sappington read a letter into the record on behalf of the city and its employees saying that one of the poorest cities in the state was "shocked and devastated" to learn that one of its trusted public servants had stolen from them. City Manager Scott Frank added that the city has "suffered as a team" as a result of Wilson's actions.

McCarthy expressed his disappointment in Wilson and admonished her for betraying Nelsonville's trust and betraying her fiduciary responsibilities. The judge added his displeasure that Wilson has not made any effort to make restitution to this point and has not been able to inform the court as to the whereabouts of the stolen funds. He did, however, find that Wilson was remorseful for her actions.

McCarthy ordered the full restitution amount of \$213,918.31 and made her responsible for the bill from the State Auditor's Office. He also ordered her Public Employee Retirement System funds forfeit to City of Nelsonville. McCarthy also fined Wilson \$20,000 and agreed to suspend the fine if restitution was made in a timely and reasonable manner. He ordered her to pay a minimum of \$100 per month but emphasized to her that paying it back in full quickly would be to her benefit.

"I'm happy the City of Nelsonville has been awarded restitution in the full amount that the auditor found was missing. We still have a pending case in which there's additional theft alleged," Blackburn said after the hearing. "We requested six years in prison because based on the amount of money she stole, we thought that was fair. The sentence the court chose allows Wilson to apply for judicial release. The State opposes a release unless and until significant restitution is made."

