



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ethics Complaints Update

The Greene County Commissioners directed outside counsel on Friday, January 12 to continue to assist the County in fully cooperating with the Missouri Ethics Commission's investigation, which has been ongoing since December.

As part of this process, Greene County continues to collect, review, and produce many thousands of emails and other records to investigators and attorneys at the Ethics Commission. Witnesses will also be interviewed by counsel. The Ethics Commission will then receive a report from its investigators and will take a vote on whether the facts support a finding of reasonable grounds to believe the law was violated. If so, it may refer the matter to prosecutors. If it finds probable cause, the Commission can refer the matter to the appropriate disciplinary authority or institute its own civil enforcement action to collect penalties or stop unlawful conduct.

The Ethics Commission exercises jurisdiction as Missouri's non-partisan, statewide ethics and campaign watchdog and enforcer. It is responsible for investigating and enforcing the allegations at issue here: that County resources were used to advocate regarding last November's sales tax measure. Because the Ethics Commission is assigned these duties under Missouri law, it has decades of experience not only in enforcing Missouri's statute on public entity participation in campaigns, but also in determining how much (if any) support was given to the measure in violation of the law. Greene County instructed its attorneys at Graves Garrett to fully cooperate with the Ethics Commission's investigation from day one. While this was ongoing, unfortunately, the State Auditor apparently planned her own auxiliary investigation of the same allegations without first contacting the Ethics Commission. She also issued numerous statements through the media while refusing to provide adequate information to Greene County about the scope of the auxiliary investigation she planned to conduct. The Auditor could not give any examples of having conducted a full review under this statute or of any campaign finance issue like this. The end result of the Auditor's review could only have been a referral to the state agencies that actually have jurisdiction in this area, but the main agency, the Ethics Commission, has already hit the ground running. The Auditor performed a valuable service in receiving and publicizing whistleblower complaints, but it is now time for the Auditor to step back and let the responsible state officials do their work. The County now calls on everyone with information, including the State Auditor, to join the County in assisting the Ethics Commission investigation and focusing 100% of their efforts on turning over their own responsive information to the Commission. Presiding Commissioner Bob Cirtin said, "I believe we are on the best path to demonstrate to the public our desire to pursue and reveal the truth. The Commission and our attorneys will continue to devote all of their efforts to provide the Missouri Ethics Commission with everything they need to conduct their investigation."

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