

Former Jackson County S&W district coordinator pleads not guilty

Written by Marty Randall

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Rebecca Lauster, the former Jackson County Soil and Water Conservation District coordinator accused of taking money from her office, has pleaded not guilty to six counts of Class D felony theft.

Lauster had her initial hearing before Judge Frank Guthrie on Tuesday, March 26, in Jackson Circuit Court, Brownstown.

The woman was targeted as a suspect in an Indiana State Police investigation requested by the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office last November. According to Detective Rachel Eickholtz, allegations had been made that Lauster had misappropriated funds from the office while acting as the District's coordinator and treasurer.

After an audit was completed by the Indiana State Board of Accounts, a number of unauthorized personal expenditures and what was described as "excess" expenses were discovered on the business account credit card. Those amounted to over \$13,000 and were allegedly tied to Lauster.

In addition, the investigation also reportedly uncovered a second, unauthorized business credit card purportedly opened by Lauster. She is alleged to have forged the board president's signature to open that account, which has a balance of \$7,900. Lauster is no longer employed by the soil and water district.

Lauster, 50, has retained Mark Dove of North Vernon to act as her attorney in the matter, according to court records.

She posted a \$1,000 cash bond on March 27 and was released. No trial date has yet been scheduled, but an omnibus and pre-trial conference date of May 9 was set by Judge Guthrie, at which she is ordered to appear.

Judge Guthrie also set a plea agreement deadline of August 30.