

Former Beaufort County court clerk Smith sentenced

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Bluffton Today

Former Clerk of Court Elizabeth Mason Smith was sentenced in Federal Court Thursday for embezzling public money.

Smith, 48, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Sol Blatt Jr. to six months home confinement and two years of supervised release.

Smith pleaded guilty to conversion of public money in federal court in Charleston on April 7.

The guilty pleas established that in January 2006 she diverted at least \$68,500 in federal child support money to pay the judicial salary of a family member working for the Beaufort County Drug Court.

Federal regulations prohibit the use of such funds for judicial and staff compensation and office-related costs, according to a press notice from the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Smith paid \$68,500 in restitution before the guilty plea.

Smith also was convicted by a Beaufort County jury Sept. 20, 2010, on charges of misconduct in office and embezzlement.

She was sentenced by Circuit Court Judge Brooks Goldsmith to three years of probation and 200 hours of community service.

Smith spent \$23,511 from two clerk's office accounts, one for fines and fees collected for sentences or court ordered payments and a "bondsman" account for fees collected from bail bonding companies. She used the money to buy life insurance policies for her sister and brother-in-law and to pay for an appraisal and insurance on a family vacation house on Pawley's Island.

She was not required to pay restitution because she repaid the money before the trial.