

From the Desk of Justice of the Peace Allen Kerr

In light of recent events, steps must be taken to restore the public's faith and confidence in our County's finances. Three areas must be addressed as we move forward.

First, an audit for Pulaski County should be performed by an independent firm. Although it will cost the County to perform the audit, it will pay for itself in the long run, and the public trust can only be restored with full and open disclosure. All accounts for Pulaski County, sub-organizations, and organizations funded by public moneys should be included. The expense for the audit should be shared by all departments including road and bridge with a full report made to the Quorum Court when completed.

Second, to the extent the law allows, all current department heads and employees who control funds must have a background check to continue to have responsibility over public funds. In addition, all new hires and applicants for these positions must have background checks performed as part of the new hire process to insure full disclosure of past activities that should disqualify them from positions of financial trust.

Third, it is the duty and responsibility of each and every person in County government to protect taxpayer trust. We must implement a new system of checks and balances to prevent situations from occurring in the future. One step in this process should be to immediately close any and all checking accounts that have been dormant for over a year. A new system to safeguard funds will help to prevent errors and quickly alert the county leadership if a problem is occurring.

Although some suggest funding a new position or simply hiring a CPA as a comptroller or auditor, I am not sure that is the answer. In fact, without changing our system of controls, a more adept financial manager might have managed to avoid detection for even longer. The solution will be creating a new system to regulate the funds and then insure that on a routine basis the County has the option to utilize an outside auditor if and when questions arise.

On a positive note, current events reveal a silver lining. In the past 6 months, the Quorum Court has taken a new leadership role in managing our County. As we lead through this process, the Judge and the Judge's staff have to remain accountable for accurate data instead of the misleading revenue data provided over the past few years. By finding and correcting the revenue projections, we are well on our way to a budgetary recovery and re-establishing control over spending. The first of the redundant employee positions have been eliminated and salary sweeps implemented to put cash flow back into the general fund. We continue to demonstrate increasing levels of fiscal responsibility as we work together on the Quorum Court to find solutions to problems facing our County.

Thank you,
Allen Kerr
Justice of the Peace Dist # 3