



Attorney General Steve Marshall Announces Felony Indictment of Limestone County District Court Judge on Ethics, Exploitation, and Theft Charges

(MONTGOMERY) – Attorney General Steve Marshall announced the indictment* and arrest of Douglas Lee Patterson, a district court judge in the 39th Judicial Circuit in Limestone County, Alabama, on three felony charges: use of official position or office for personal gain, financial exploitation of the elderly in the first degree, and theft of property in the third degree.

Special agents with the Alabama Attorney General’s Office and the FBI took Patterson, 37, into custody this morning, following his indictment by a Limestone County Special Grand Jury. A bond of \$30,000 was set. By virtue of his indictment, Patterson is now formally suspended from serving as a district court judge. Limestone County Presiding Circuit Court Judge Robert Baker previously ordered that Patterson’s cases be reassigned to the county’s other judges while the State conducted its investigation.

Patterson was appointed as a district court judge in March 2016 by former Governor Robert Bentley. Before becoming a judge, Patterson worked as a local attorney, including taking assignments as a conservator for incapacitated persons.

The State’s investigation and the special grand jury’s indictment is a result of invaluable assistance from certain Limestone County judicial officials and employees. After uncovering evidence of the conduct alleged in the indictment, those individuals immediately alerted the Attorney General’s Office of the matter and have since cooperated fully in the State’s investigation.

As a result of those individuals’ assistance and the work of the Attorney General’s Special Prosecutions Division, a special grand jury composed of Limestone County citizens returned a three-count indictment against Patterson. The first count – use of official position or office for personal gain – arises from Patterson’s service as a district court judge, which includes his supervising the County’s juvenile court system. It charges that Patterson used his position as a judge to obtain \$47,008.24 from the County’s Juvenile Court Services Fund. That fund, created pursuant to statute, permits money to be expended “solely for juvenile programs, for subsistence for the juvenile court staff in Limestone County, to aid the functions of the juvenile court and for the benefit of the children of Limestone County.”

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The State's investigation has shown that, over multiple years, Patterson wrote about 70 checks to himself from this account and either cashed the checks or deposited the money into his personal bank account, his law firm's operating account, and his law firm's client-trust account. Regardless of where the money went, Patterson ultimately spent the money on himself or other personal expenses unrelated to the County's juvenile-court system.

The second count charges financial exploitation of the elderly in the first degree. It alleges Patterson breached a fiduciary duty to Mr. Charles Hardy to obtain all of or a portion of \$47,800 of Hardy's conservatorship account's money.

The State's investigation has shown that, prior to becoming a judge, Patterson became Hardy's conservator in March 2010. Hardy, who is now deceased, was an incapacitated senior living in a Limestone County nursing home for military veterans. At the time Patterson became his conservator, his account had over \$43,000. By December 2016, the account had less than \$200, and Patterson had withdrawn \$47,800 for his own personal use. As with the juvenile-court services fund, Patterson deposited Hardy's money into his personal account, his law firm account, and his business account. Some of these withdrawals took place after Patterson became a judge. In each of these instances, Patterson converted the money to personal use unrelated to Hardy's care or well-being.

The third count – theft of property in the third degree – charges that Patterson knowingly obtained or exerted unauthorized control over or knowingly obtained by deception control over a sum of money that exceeded \$499 but was less than \$1,500 and that belonged to the estate of Rudolph Allen.

The State's investigation has shown that Patterson previously served as Allen's conservator, and that following Allen's death, Patterson made cash withdrawals from Allen's account for his own personal use.

If convicted, the first two charges are Class B felonies punishable by two to twenty years in prison and a fine of up to \$30,000 each. The theft charge is a Class D felony punishable by a year and one day or up to five years in prison and a fine up to \$7,500.

"To ensure the integrity of Alabama's judicial system, Alabama judges swear an oath to faithfully and honestly perform the duties of their office," said Attorney General Marshall. "The allegations contained in this indictment shock the conscience and illustrate a callous and selfish disregard for the law as well as the welfare of Alabama's most vulnerable citizens: children and incapacitated seniors. If proven, Patterson's actions debase the judicial system. I call on the trial court to hold a trial as soon as possible to begin the process of restoring the Limestone County community's faith in its judicial system."

FBI Birmingham Special Agent in Charge (SAC) Jonnie Sharp Jr., said, “When public officials misdirect money for personal gain, they’re breaching public trust – and breaking the law. Such corruption must not go unchecked. The public can be assured that no matter how long it takes, the FBI and our partners will investigate and work to hold accountable unscrupulous public officials.”

Attorney General Marshall thanked the Birmingham Division/Huntsville RA of the FBI for partnering with his Special Prosecutions Division to investigate this matter.

Attorney General Marshall also thanked Presiding Circuit Court Judge Robert Baker of the Limestone County Circuit Court as well as the other employees of the County’s judiciary for their assistance and cooperation in this matter.

**An indictment is merely an accusation. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.*