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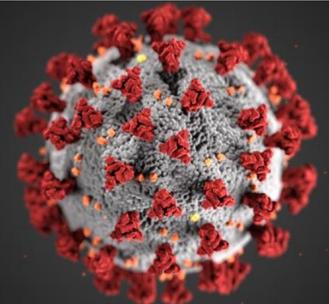
Wednesday, May 24, 2017

## Former Oklahoma Beef Council Employee Pleads Guilty to \$2.6 Million Embezzlement and Signing a False Tax Return

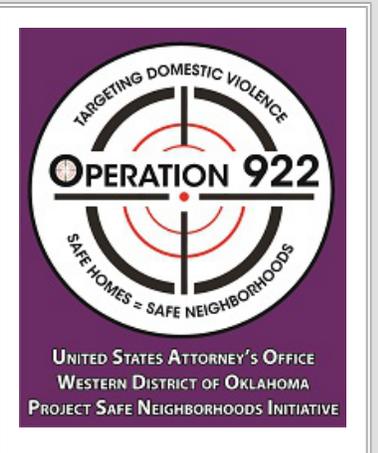
*Oklahoma City, Oklahoma* – **MELISSA DAY MORTON**, of Edmond, Oklahoma, pled guilty today to bank fraud and signing a false federal income tax return, in connection with a \$2.6 million embezzlement from the Oklahoma Beef Council, announced Mark A. Yancey, United States Attorney for the Western District of Oklahoma.

On May 10, 2017, Morton was charged by information with one count of bank fraud and one count of filing a false federal income tax return. From October 1995 until late July 2016, Morton worked as the Accounting and Compliance Manager at the Oklahoma Beef Council in Oklahoma City. As part of her job, Morton prepared checks, paid invoices, and generated financial statements for audits. Today, Morton pled guilty to preparing an unauthorized company check, in the amount of \$5,652.25, made payable to herself in February 2016. Morton admitted that she forged the signature of the Beef Council's executive director on the check and later presented that check for payment against the Beef Council's bank account at a local bank. As part of her plea, Morton further admitted that she embezzled funds from her former employer from around 2009 through 2016, and stipulated that the total loss to the Oklahoma Beef Council from her embezzlement scheme was \$2,681,400.73.

In addition to pleading guilty to bank fraud, Morton pled guilty to signing a



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false tax return. She admitted that on October 12, 2015, she signed a personal federal tax return for the 2014 calendar year that she knew was false because it reported only \$183,545 in total income. At today’s plea hearing, Morton admitted that she omitted on the 2014 return more than \$388,000 of embezzled income for that year from the Oklahoma Beef Council.

At sentencing, Morton faces up to 30 years in prison on the bank fraud count, plus five years of supervised release, and a \$1,000,000 fine. Morton also faces up to three years in prison on the tax count, in addition to one year of supervised release, a \$250,000 fine, and restitution to the Internal Revenue Service for the tax loss. Morton will be sentenced in approximately 90 days. Reference is made to the information and other public filings for further information.

This case is the result of an investigation by the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigations, United States Secret Service, and United States Department of Agriculture – Office of Inspector General. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Chris M. Stephens.

**Topic(s):**  
Financial Fraud

**Component(s):**  
USAO - Oklahoma, Western

Updated May 25, 2017



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