



Office of the Mayor
BENTON COUNTY TENNESSEE

1 Court Square, Room 102
Camden, TN 38320

PRESS RELEASE

Profit over people: Sheriff's lawyer files suit when county won't pay attorneys' fees.

Near \$1 million increase in sheriff's budget, not enough for Christopher and Herron.

Benton County, Tennessee, June 30, 2023: Benton County Mayor Mark Ward was sued by the Sheriff, Kenny Christopher, seeking more and more money after the county commission awarded almost \$1,000,000 in additional funds.

What does he want? Replacement cars for vehicles the sheriff's office wrecked, and lawyer fees incurred by the Sheriff, that he instead wants the county to pay.

In an email to the County Attorney, former Democratic Senator Roy Herron, now in private practice after losing his bid for Congress to Stephen Fincher, laid out his promise to file suit on behalf of the sheriff.

Herron's priority? That Benton County taxpayers would be responsible for paying his legal fees, no matter which side prevails at trial. His email, which was sent before any lawsuit was filed, set forth that his fees even before filing any lawsuit are \$30,000 - \$40,000, and "growing daily." These legal fees, set in motion at Sheriff Christopher's request, are already being billed to the citizens of Benton County.

Instead of responsibly using the near \$1 million awarded to the Sheriff by the Commission, Christopher and Herron are making one last money grab at the expense of the taxpayers.

This isn't Herron's first time to attempt to extract his fees from a rural community instead of his client. He previously filed suit on behalf of sheriffs in Hardeman, Decatur, and most recently Henderson Counties and is currently a defendant in a legal malpractice case filed by the sheriff in Hardeman County. Herron's bills, coming in at exorbitant amounts close to one million dollars in some instances, have been reduced by court orders in other cases for duplicate entries, billing for administrative tasks, and have been challenged for improper billing, including in one instance, billing over 24 hours in one day.

Mayor Ward stated: *"I am personally pained and disappointed at hearing this news. In recent times, Attorney Roy Herron has apparently been making a lucrative business out of suing the taxpayers of various counties, collecting handsome "legal fees" along the way. His sights, along with those of Sheriff Christopher, are now firmly fixed on the wallets of our citizens, especially those on fixed incomes. Benton County was forced to diminish efforts in other areas in an unsuccessful effort to satisfy the sheriff. All staff in his department were given \$1.50 per hour raises, across the board, which brings deputies and correctional officers to among the top paid in our area. The sheriff demanded an unworkable \$5.00 per hour increase. During the budget process, he angrily stormed out of meetings and repeatedly refused to contribute any information to the budget conversation. I believe that the budget committee has done all that it can do to assist the sheriff, and their efforts have been met with hostility and immaturity by our county's chief law enforcement officer. I would like folks to keep in mind that we estimate for every \$28,000 that this lawsuit costs Benton County, the sheriff will be forcing a one cent property tax increase upon our most vulnerable citizens. I*

believe that it's unconscionable to take money from our elderly, single moms and children's futures, in order to pad the pockets of a wealthy attorney."

The Benton County Mayor's Office continually strives to better serve the people of Benton County and to move our community forward for the advancement of our county and its citizens.

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