

## Former Mercer clerk Compton to repay missing money

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**Ronnie Compton**

HARRODSBURG - Former Mercer County Clerk Ronnie Compton was sentenced to a year in prison Tuesday, but he won't have to serve it if he pays back about \$11,000 and stays out of trouble for five years.

Mercer Circuit Judge Darren Peckler signed off of the deal recommended by prosecutors that allows Compton to enter a felony diversion program rather than go to jail.

Compton entered an Alford plea earlier to a charge that he failed to deposit \$11,123 in fees and other monies collected in his office in 2006. In an Alford plea, a defendant does not admit guilt but acknowledges that there is enough evidence for a conviction if the case goes to trial.

Compton declined to comment after sentencing Tuesday, but his attorney, Shannon Sexton of Covington, said his client maintains his innocence.

"He has never admitted his guilt to this," Sexton said.

Compton, who had no prior criminal record, agreed to the plea deal because he did not have to admit guilt and avoids jail time if he meets the condition of the diversion program, his attorney said. "Mr. Compton had a very good case for trial but didn't want to go through a trial and risk his freedom," Sexton said.

### State investigation

In 2006, state Auditor Crit Luallen issued a report showing that Compton's office collected \$99,686 in 2005 but only turned over \$89,521 to Fiscal Court, a difference of \$10,165. The auditor's office turned its findings over to Kentucky State Police.

Compton was defeated in his re-election bid in 2006 by Chris Horn. He paid back \$10,122 to Fiscal Court after leaving office, but an incomplete audit for 2006 indicated that \$11,123 in deposits from the first half of that year were undeposited.

That led to Compton being indicted for theft more than \$300 by failure to make required disposition of property. The indictment alleged that Compton "obtained property belonging to the office of the Mercer County clerk that was subject to a known legal obligation to make a specified payment ... and intentionally dealt with this property as his own and/or failed to make required payment ..."

As part of Tuesday's plea deal, Compton will be on unsupervised probation for five years and must make restitution within that time.

"Restitution is the real issue here," Peckler said.

If Compton pays the money back and stays out of trouble, the felony charge will not appear on his record. If he fails to meet those terms, however, he will be charged with the felony and subject to the one-year prison term.

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