

PTO, former treasurer at odds over amount of stolen money

Written by MITCH MAERSCH
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As of Tuesday, the prosecution and defense were about \$5,000 apart in the case of Melinda Cooney's embezzlement from the Cedar Grove-Belgium Parent Teacher Organization.

PTO President Colleen Menzel testified during a restitution hearing Tuesday that Cooney owes the group the organization would like more than \$15,200 back from Cooney.

The former treasurer of the PTO was slated to be sentenced Wednesday in Sheboygan County Circuit Court for felony identity theft.

She pleaded no contest to the charge on Feb. 15.

Defense attorney Dean Dietrich had independent CPA Janice Secord testify that less than \$10,300 was taken.

Secord said she didn't include bank fees for overdrafts in her total and left out some checks for PTO events. She said she started with a PTO request of \$20,000 in restitution and narrowed it down from there, using PTO records, some of which were incomplete.

Cooney has already paid back \$8,200. She still owes between \$1,971 and \$7,000, depending on the ruling of the judge.

Assistant District Attorney Nathan Haberman reviewed several checks from 2007 to 2010 with Menzel, who explained why the amount of some checks were questionably high for a given event and why some checks written to and signed by Cooney raised a red flag.

Cooney, 41, of Cedar Grove, was treasurer of the PTO from 2007 to 2010. She was the only person listed on the PTO's checking account and check card, a system the PTO since changed because of the case.

Menzel testified that the PTO restitution request does not include missing cash because that cannot be tracked.

Cooney faces a maximum \$10,000 fine and six years in prison.

According to the criminal complaint, Cooney admitted taking money from the organization at a PTO meeting last September, but said she didn't know how much.

Cooney said she would repay the money she stole and turned over all receipts, checks, debit cards and banking statements from her time as treasurer, according to the complaint.

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During an interview with a Sheboygan County Sheriff's Department detective last October, Cooney said she was under significant financial pressure and chose to do something wrong, and that she wanted to take responsibility for her actions and pay back the PTO, according to the complaint.