



BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



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PRESS RELEASE

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FORMER CHICO STATE ACCOUNTING PROFESSOR AND DEPARTMENT SECRETARY PLEAD NO-CONTEST IN GRAND THEFT SCHEME

A former Chico State professor and department chair, along with his department secretary, pleaded no-contest in Butte County Superior Court yesterday to charges of grand theft in a case that alleged they submitted fraudulent expenses to the university. Another professor in the same department was not held to answer on similar charges.

Timothy Kizirian, 54, a former tenured professor and chair of the Department of Accounting in the School of Business, and the department secretary **Ronda McGrath**, 57, entered their pleas in a case that stemmed from an internal university investigation into financial irregularities in the department.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said the investigation alleged approximately \$1.12 million had been spent over a period of several years on items such as duplicate compensation, gift card purchases, fraudulent mileage claims, improper travel and personal expenses – including meals, hospitality, gifts, and unreported absences.

In addition to his felony plea, Kizirian stipulated to criminal restitution in the amount of \$26,627.01. McGrath pled to misdemeanor grand theft and stipulated to pay criminal restitution of \$1,035.31. Ramsey said McGrath's misdemeanor disposition was appropriate given her reduced culpability as determined by the investigation, and significantly lower losses to the university directly attributable to her.

Also, in court yesterday, another accounting professor in the department under Kizirian, **Jeffrey Decker**, 60, proceeded to a preliminary hearing on charges associated with his involvement in the scheme. After that hearing, Superior Court Judge Michael Deems found there was insufficient evidence to sustain the charges against Decker. The judge ruled Decker may have subjectively believed his spending activities were appropriate given the University's lax travel and hospitality policies and the evidence was insufficient to prove that Decker acted with criminal intent.

Ramsey said the charges in the felony criminal complaint against the three former university employees represented a small subset of the activities revealed by the university's internal

auditors. Ramsey said the majority of the activities discovered by the university auditors represented situations that grew from lax oversight by the University, including insufficient management and accounting controls and inadequate policy safeguards, but were not by themselves illegal, or were cases where evidence was insufficient to obtain a criminal conviction.

Ramsey said Kizirian faces up to three years in jail when sentenced on May 11, 2023. In light of her misdemeanor plea, McGrath was sentenced to one year of court probation along with fines and the stipulated restitution.