

STATE OF MARYLAND
V.
DENISE RENEE SHORTS
12718 Whisper Trace Drive
Ocean City, MD 21842

* IN THE
* CIRCUIT COURT FOR
* WORCESTER COUNTY
* CASE NO.: C-23-CR-26-000049
* TRACKING NO.: 257023000824

Defendant

* * * * *

CRIMINAL INFORMATION

THE STATE PROSECUTOR for the State of Maryland, informs and charges, DENISE RENEE SHORTS with having committed the following offenses:

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

At all times relevant to this Information:

1. Title I, Part A ("Title I") of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, is a grant intended to provide supplemental financial assistance to school districts for children from low-income families. The purpose of the grant is to provide all children the opportunity to receive a fair and high-quality education, and to close educational gaps by allocating federal funds for education programs and services.
2. Title I allocations to state and local education agencies are based primarily on annually updated poverty estimates. Then, within the location education agencies, allocations to schools are based on school poverty rates.
3. Worcester County is awarded a Title I grant by the U.S. Department of Education and dispersed and monitored by the Maryland State Department of Education. The grant award is required to be allocated between Title I schools within Worcester County.

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4. Denise Shorts (“SHORTS”) began working for Worcester County Public Schools (“WCPS”) in 1989 as an elementary school teacher. SHORTS resigned in March 2026.

5. In 2019, SHORTS was promoted to the Chief Academic Officer, also known as the Assistant Superintendent, for WCPS, grades pre-kindergarten through eighth grade, and became a member of the Worcester County Board of Education (“WCBOE”).

6. As of July 1, 2025, SHORTS earned a salary of \$178,212.

7. From approximately 2014 through 2025, SHORTS also acted as the Title I Grant Coordinator for WCPS. In that role, SHORTS oversaw the Title I grant application, budget, and finances related to the Title I grant awarded to WCPS by the U.S. Department of Education and monitored by the Maryland State Department of Education.

8. In or around 2021, SHORTS and a Title I Consultant for the WCBOE, purchased a learning center in Berlin, Maryland, serving children from six weeks to five years old.

9. Different employees within WCPS are entrusted with utilizing a Purchase Card, also known as a “P-Card.” A P-Card is a credit card issued to select WCPS employees, to be utilized for purchases of materials or services for the school system.

10. Purchases made using a P-Card are required to be made for educational purposes, including office supplies, equipment, and other items, and thus are typically exempt from sales tax.

11. Public school boards in Maryland are exempt from state sales tax on purchases used for educational purposes by obtaining a sales and use tax exemption certificate. This covers office supplies, equipment, and items for authorized school fundraising activities

12. At the end of each monthly statement period, authorized P-Card users receive their P-Card statement and are required to attach receipts to support the purchases on the statement. The

users write a code on their statement indicating the appropriate account, or grant, from which the funds should be withdrawn. The users sign the credit card statement acknowledging its accuracy, and submit the statement for additional review, ultimately to the finance department for the WCBOE.

13. In or around January 2014, SHORTS was issued a P-Card in her name.

14. On January 28, 2014, SHORTS signed a Credit Card Use Agreement (“Agreement”), acknowledging that the P-Card issued to her was for WCPS “approved purchases only and [could] NOT be used to purchase personal items.” The Agreement stated that if an item for personal use was inadvertently charged to the P-Card, the user would “make full reimbursement to the WCBOE Finance Department within seven (7) days of the transaction date.”

15. Pursuant to the Agreement, SHORTS acknowledged that “[n]o other person [was] permitted to use the [P-]Card” issued to her, and that SHORTS was accountable for all charges on the P-Card.

II. AMAZON PURCHASES AND FALSE RECEIPTS

16. The State incorporates paragraphs 1 – 15 of this Information as though fully set forth herein.

17. SHORTS was permitted to make purchases on her personal Amazon.com (“Amazon”) account utilizing her P-Card if the purchases were for educational purposes, pursuant to the Agreement.

18. Amazon submits Level 3 data to credit card companies for certain businesses and government entities, including WCPS.

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19. Level 3 data is line-item transaction details sent with credit card payments, including information including item descriptions, quantities, product codes, and unit prices, rather than just a total charge.

20. From approximately 2019 through and including October 2025, SHORTS used the P-Card issued to her to purchase approximately \$118,741.89 in items from Amazon that were personal in nature and were not materials or services for WCPS.

21. From approximately 2019 through and including October 2025, SHORTS submitted false receipts to support the Amazon charges on her P-Card.

22. Specifically, SHORTS printed a legitimate Amazon receipt and a fake Amazon receipt that appeared to be a purchase for materials related to schools. SHORTS then cut out the product description and/or the shipping address on the fake Amazon receipt, and used tape to affix the fake product description and/or shipping address over the item description or shipping address on the legitimate receipt.

23. SHORTS photocopied the altered receipt and submitted the copy with her P-Card statement to the WCBOE finance department. SHORTS signed each P-Card statement verifying its accuracy and provided a budget code for each altered receipt.

24. From approximately 2019 through and including her last P-Card statement submission in July 2025, SHORTS used the budget code for the WCPS Title I grant and indicated that \$84,365.82 in personal purchases were related to Title I materials or services. That amount was deducted from the Title I grant given to WCPS, which was intended to benefit students from low-income families.

25. For example, on or around June 18, 2023, SHORTS used her P-Card to purchase a solar powered pool skimmer from Amazon, for a total cost of \$899.00. The shipping address for the purchase was SHORTS's residence.

26. SHORTS altered the June 18, 2023 receipt. At the end of the P-Card billing cycle, SHORTS submitted a false receipt to the WCBOE finance department, indicating that she purchased an area rug for a classroom and that the shipping address was the WCBOE. SHORTS provided the budget code for the WCPS Title I grant.

27. For example, on or around June 3, 2024, SHORTS used her P-Card to purchase a robot pool vacuum from Amazon, for a total cost of \$1,869.00. The shipping address was the WCBOE.

28. SHORTS altered the June 3, 2024 receipt. At the end of the P-Card billing cycle, SHORTS submitted a false receipt to the WCBOE finance department, indicating that she purchased a room partition for a classroom. SHORTS provided the budget code for the WCPS Title I grant.

29. For example, on or around March 17, 2025, SHORTS used her P-Card to purchase a heavy-duty inversion table from Amazon, for a total cost of \$499.00. The shipping address for the purchase was SHORTS's residence.

30. SHORTS altered the March 17, 2025 receipt. At the end of the P-Card billing cycle, SHORTS submitted a false receipt to the WCBOE finance department, indicating that she purchased an area rug for a classroom, and that the area rug was shipped to the WCBOE. SHORTS provided the budget code for the WCPS Title I grant.

31. SHORTS also utilized her P-Card to make purchases to benefit the learning center owned by herself jointly with a WCPS Title I Consultant.

32. For example, on or around May 30, 2022, SHORTS used her P-Card to purchase a children's area rug, for a total cost of \$568.94. The shipping address was the learning center.

33. SHORTS altered the May 30, 2022 receipt. At the end of the P-Card billing cycle, SHORTS submitted a false receipt to the WCBOE finance department, indicating that the children's area rug was shipped to the WCBOE. SHORTS provided the budget code for the WCPS Title I grant.

34. For example, on or around September 9, 2023, SHORTS used her P-Card to purchase five Apple iPads for a total cost of \$594.00. The shipping address was the WCBOE.

35. SHORTS did not alter the September 9, 2023 receipt submitted to the WCBOE finance department, but distributed the Apple iPads at her learning center, rather than for the benefit of WCPS students. SHORTS provided the budget code for the WCPS Title I grant.

36. SHORTS also owned a vacation home in Florida. SHORTS utilized her P-Card to make purchases to furnish her vacation home.

37. For example, on or around July 23, 2024, SHORTS used her P-Card to purchase a Samsung 55-inch smart TV, for a total cost of \$404.45. The shipping address was SHORTS's vacation home in Florida.

38. SHORTS altered the July 23, 2024 receipt. At the end of the P-Card billing cycle, SHORTS submitted a false receipt to the WCBOE finance department, indicating that she purchased an area rug for a classroom, and that the area rug was shipped to the WCBOE. SHORTS provided the budget code for the WCPS Title I grant.

39. For example, on or around December 13, 2024, SHORTS used her P-Card to purchase a queen-sized bedframe, for a total cost of \$924.48. The shipping address was SHORTS's vacation home in Florida.

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40. SHORTS altered the December 13, 2024 receipt. At the end of the P-Card billing cycle, SHORTS submitted a false receipt to the WCBOE finance department, indicating that she purchased a room partition with sound dampening panels for a classroom, and that the partition was shipped to the WCBOE. SHORTS provided the budget code for the WCPS Title I grant.

41. SHORTS also made thousands of dollars in purchases on clothing, shoes, purses, hair and skin care, cosmetics, home goods, and other personal items using her P-Card.

42. All purchases made by SHORTS using her P-Card were tax free, due to the tax exemption offered to public schools.

43. In July 2025, the Office of Legislative Audits (“OLA”) conducted an audit of WCPS, including the P-Card issued to SHORTS. OLA investigators identified a discrepancy between the Level 3 Amazon data provided by WCBOE’s bank, and the receipts submitted by SHORTS.

44. In an attempt to claim that the data provided by Amazon was incorrect and that the Level 3 data corresponded with purchases on her personal credit card, rather than her P-Card, SHORTS created false personal credit card statements from approximately 2022 through July 2025.

45. Specifically, SHORTS altered the credit card statements in the same manner she altered the receipts submitted to the WCBOE finance department; SHORTS printed her personal credit card statements and used white out or taped false purchases onto her credit card statements. SHORTS copied the false statements and provided the copies to the WCBOE finance department

COUNT ONE

Embezzlement – Misappropriation by a Fiduciary

46. From approximately 2019 through and including October 2025, at Worcester County, Maryland, DENISE RENEE SHORTS, being a fiduciary of Worcester County Public

Schools, did fraudulently and willfully appropriate to a use contrary to her trust, money held by her in her fiduciary capacity, to wit: SHORTS, being the Chief Academic Officer for grades pre-kindergarten through eighth grade and the Title I Grant Coordinator for Worcester County Public Schools, and having a duty to ensure that purchases were made in accordance with educational and grant purposes, made purchases of \$118,741.89 for her personal use and benefit, in violation of Criminal Law Article, §7-113 of the *Annotated Code of Maryland*, and against the peace, government, and dignity of the State.

CR 7-113
CJIS Code 1-2799
Penalty: Not less than 1 year and not exceeding 5 years

COUNT TWO
Theft Scheme Over \$100,000

47. From approximately 2019 through and including October 2025, at Worcester County, Maryland, DENISE RENEE SHORTS did, pursuant to one scheme and continuing course of conduct, steal \$118,741.89 from Worcester County Public Schools, in the form of personal purchases on Amazon.com utilizing a Purchase Card, having a value of \$100,000 or more, in violation of Criminal Law Article, § 7-104 of the Annotated Code of Maryland and against the peace, government, and dignity of the State.

CR 7-104
CJIS Code 1-1134
Penalty: 20 years and/or \$25,000

COUNT THREE
Misconduct in Office

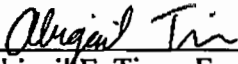
48. From approximately 2019 through and including October 2025, at Worcester County, Maryland, DENISE RENEE SHORTS, in violation and perversion of her duties as the Chief Academic Officer and Title I Grant Coordinator for Worcester County Public Schools, did

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corruptly commit misconduct in office by knowingly, willfully, and intentionally acting in her official capacity and making personal purchases using County funds and submitting false receipts to support those purchases, while in the course of her official duties, in violation of the Common Law of Maryland and against the peace, government, and dignity of the State.

Common Law
CJIS Code 2-0645
Penalty: Anything not cruel and unusual

Respectfully Submitted,
Charlton T. Howard, III
Maryland State Prosecutor
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