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**\*\*\*MEDIA ALERT\*\*\***

**For Immediate Release**

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## **SHOULDERS TO PAY \$57K IN RESTITUTION TO NONPROFITS SELECTED BY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE**

VANDERBURGH COUNTY, Ind. — The Vanderburgh County Prosecutor's Office has selected several local nonprofits to benefit from more than \$57,000 in restitution that will be paid by former County Commissioner Benjamin Shoulders following his misuse of campaign funds, which was discovered after he filed a fraudulent police report.

As part of a plea agreement, Shoulders will pay \$57,164.24 split between five local nonprofits after the misspending of funds from his campaign account.

In October 2023, Shoulders made a report to the Evansville Police Department Financial Crimes Unit claiming he had discovered several fraudulent purchases on his bank statement. He said he was also seeking reimbursement for the fraudulent charges from the bank. The reported fraud occurred to Shoulder's campaign account, which was listed as "Shoulders For Commissioner."

Shoulders was ultimately arrested after a lengthy police investigation involving the gathering of records from bank transactions, campaign donations, cell phone records, and more.

The investigation revealed that Shoulders had used his "Shoulders for Commissioner" campaign account to purchase things like sports memorabilia. Detectives also found records showing money documented as donations to local nonprofits, but those donations were never actually made. Checks were also found to have been moved from the campaign account into a separate account opened by Shoulders.

Through the Plea Agreement filed by the State, Shoulders will plead guilty to one count of Filing Fraudulent Report, a Level 6 Felony, and will be ordered to complete a six-month period of standard probation. If Shoulders successfully completes that probationary period without any additional arrests or charges in any jurisdiction, the charge will be entered as a Class A misdemeanor with a sentence of 1 year, suspended.

In addition, the agreement states that Shoulders must pay restitution in the amount of \$57,164.24 for the monies that he wrongly spent.

The restitution paid by Shoulders will be split into five equal portions of \$11,432.84 and distributed to the following organizations:

- Holly's House
- Little Lambs
- Parenting Time Center
- Vanderburgh County Humane Society
- Youth Resources of Southwestern Indiana

"Today, Ben Shoulders will plead guilty to Filing a Fraudulent Report, a Level 6 Felony, and pay full restitution for the misuse of his campaign funds. This is a powerful affirmation that public officials are held to a high standard and must be held accountable when they improperly take advantage of the trust and contributions of their supporters for personal use. Due to an exhaustive investigation by the Financial Crimes Unit of the Evansville Police Department, Shoulders was found to have misspent \$57,164.24 and he will be paying back every cent of that sum. This is an extraordinary win where misused dollars will literally be redirected for the benefit of the Vanderburgh County community. We are proud to announce that through this successful prosecution, the Prosecutor's Office has chosen five non-profit organizations to receive \$11,432.84 each: Holly's House, Little Lambs, Parenting Time Center, Vanderburgh County Humane Society, and Youth Resources of Southwestern Indiana. This will have a tremendous impact on the lives of children, families, animals, crime victims, and others in need, which is especially welcome news in this holiday season," Prosecutor Diana Moers stated.