

Charges mount against embezzler Richard Short

He's accused of swindling ex-neighbor, parole violations



By **CHRIS CHRISTOFF - FREE PRESS LANSING BUREAU**

Parolee and convicted embezzler Richard Short, who was granted a \$9.1-million tax break this week by an unwitting state agency, was charged today with 24 felony counts of swindling an 86-year-old former neighbor out of thousands of dollars and possessions.

Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton said today that Short fraudulently obtained power of attorney for Margaret Bennett and then used an ATM card to take money from her bank account and possessions from her Flint area home after she was placed in a nursing home for dementia.

Bennett had been appointed a conservator by a judge earlier.

Flint's 67th District Court Judge John Conover set a \$9.2 million bond for Short, who has been in Genesee County Jail since he was arrested Wednesday for violating his parole on a 2002 embezzlement conviction.

County Prosecutor David Leyton had asked Conover to set the bond at \$9.1 million, the same amount in tax breaks Short had won from the state for his fledgling renewable energy enterprise.

Short objected to the high bond, saying he never received any money from the state. Leyton argued the tax credit would have allowed him to lure investors "to a company that doesn't exist."

Leyton added, "We need to keep him behind bars and protect the public."

Conover set a pretrial hearing for next Friday, and a preliminary examination for March 30, and said he would give Short time to find an attorney.

Short told the court he has no money.

Leyton said because Short is being labeled a habitual offender he could face up to life in prison on the new charges.

Sheriff Robert Pickell called Short a predator who needs to be stopped.

"Scamming the State of Michigan is one thing, it causes a great deal of embarrassment of state officials," Pickell said. "But preying on an elderly, vulnerable adult is, quite frankly, another thing."

Pickell said new suspicions about Short preying on Bennett arose after publicity that he had conned the state into a tax break for his fledgling Flint business.

He said investigators began questioning the mobile home park manager who told them Short had taken things out of Bennett's vacant home.

The new charges came hours after the Michigan Department of Corrections charged Short with traveling out of

Michigan without permission for two days in February (to Florida), possessing prescription drugs unlawfully and having prohibited credit cards and a checking account.

He will undergo a hearing on those charges within 45 days, said Russ Marlan, spokesman for the state Department of Corrections.

Short was arrested Wednesday at his Flint mobile home for parole violations, one day after the tax break for his proposed new business was announced by Gov. Jennifer Granholm, along with tax breaks for 12 other companies. Short has since been in custody at the Genesee County jail.

Short still owes \$96,000 in restitution for his past crimes, according to the corrections department.

Short, 57, proposed to the Michigan Economic Development Corporation that he would spend \$18.5 million to convert a former automotive plant in Flint to manufacture portable renewable energy equipment to be shipped to Africa for use in impoverished villages.

He had promised to hire up to 765 people within five years.

Discovery of Short's criminal past prompted MEDC officials to withdraw the approved tax credit for Short's plan.

The MEDC also announced it would require criminal background checks for future applicants of state tax breaks.

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