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GUEST BOOK

Guest Book

Judge rules for people's DPS audit



Greg Frazier

By Diane Bukowski

The Michigan Citizen

DETROIT — As Detroit Public Schools czar Robert Bobb slashes and burns his way through the district, closing schools and cutting staff based on publicly undisclosed audits, Greg Frazier, C.P.A., has won a major victory, a court order mandating a people's audit of DPS finances.

Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Wendy Baxter on June 8 issued a Consent Judgment for the Plaintiff [Frazier], following her grant of a motion for summary disposition filed earlier by Frazier's attorney John Royal.

"My attorney said it's a resounding, unqualified victory," said Frazier, who had just dropped off a check at Royal's office to pay DPS for the cost of disclosure. "We took it all the way to the mat, and DPS finally admitted, after fighting us tooth and nail for three years, that we were entitled to all the information I requested. That information belongs to the people."

The Michigan Coalition for Welfare Rights and Call 'Em Out were the two organizations who engaged Frazier to conduct the audit.

William Mims, a senior community-activist, who for years has challenged the school district and city government's treatment of the public on radio talk shows and public hearings, responded to the news.

"The American system was never set up to truly educate Black children," Mims said. "The state, two governors, and the Black leadership of our city are failing the children of Detroit, the largest Black district in the world. I believe that both the governor and the school district should be sued for the money they have cost our children. When I was younger, I would never have believed that the children of people who washed clothes and scrubbed floors for a living would turn out to be such fools for material gain. The people must get control of the whole school district."

Judge Baxter's ruling specified that DPS provide on a CD every element of cash disbursement information Frazier had requested for DPS fiscal year 2005-06, as follows:

1. Payee's identification code or data base key;
2. Payee's company name;



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**ESTABLISH JUSTICE,
CREATE PEACE ZONES**

**WHY ARE CITY SERVICES
SO BAD IN DETROIT?
PART 1**

PART 2

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EMAIL US
Email Us

3. Payee's federal employer identification number;
4. Payee's contact person's name
5. Payee's address with city, state and zip code in separate columns;
6. Amount of the payment;
7. Check number for the payment;
8. Date of the check;
9. Invoice number to which the account was applied (optional);
10. The purchase order number or equivalent control number for which the invoice was charged;
11. A description of the product or service.

Judge Baxter ordered that the information be provided within 30 days of her order, for a nominal fee of \$113.94.

"The decision of DPS to end its efforts not to provide information about its vendors was very much in the public interest," said Royal. "Mr. Frazier has been willing for several years to volunteer his services to provide a community audit, an impartial and objective analysis by someone who has no ties to the school system."

The district had contended for three years that the request was "either impossible, unduly burdensome, or extremely expensive," according to a brief Royal filed early in May. However, Frazier said, an expert witness testified that collection of such information by DPS staff through the People Soft/Oracle system should take only one-and-a-half hours.

"School districts all over the state have begun to post on-line by way of electronic data for free review and inspection by citizens exactly the information which the plaintiff requested in his original FOIA," Royal added in the brief. "There is no reason by logic or common sense that the DPS cannot do the same."

Royal cited a May 5 press release from the Mackinac Center indicating that one of every seven students in Michigan now goes to a school district which posts "an on-line check register to give the public up-to-date, accurate and thorough information about all district expenditures."

Districts doing so were responding to the center's request, said Kenneth Braun, director of the Mackinac Center's ongoing "Show Michigan the Money" transparency project, in the release.

So far, the Utica School District, the second largest in the state according to the Mackinac Center, the Dearborn district, the fifth largest in the state, and half of Oakland County's districts have posted on-line check registers.

Braun said in a phone interview that the request has not gone to charter schools.

"Charter schools have private management companies and the like," Braun said. "Public school districts are larger. We just finished getting in contact with the rest of the districts, and



now have about 40 posted on our website who are complying. We are trying to make districts aware that it is a trend that is coming."

The Center is known as a conservative think tank, which supports many forms of privatization, including charter schools.

"The mission and objectives of the citizens usually don't jibe with the mission of the establishment, which frequently has another agenda," Frazier said. "A so-called 'knight in shining armor' like Robert Bobb is all well and good, but we want the people to control the information. There is a huge disconnect between the people and folks running our governments."

Frazier said he expects to have the data analyzed for publication on a website in the next two months. His next goal is to educate the public to understand that the analysis will not necessarily show "corruption automatically falling off the pages." He said he is seeking to expose the bigger picture, which includes evidence of inadequate accounting controls that leave the DPS financial system open to fraud.

Frazier plans to ask for information for current years as well. He said he will call his analyses "Mims Audits," after William Mims.

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