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PRESS RELEASE

JAMES B. DUNN, DISTRICT ATTORNEY GENERAL

FOURTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

January 11, 2018

District Attorney General James B. Dunn advises that he was appointed District Attorney Pro Tem by Order of the Circuit Court for Bradley County, Tennessee on July 1, 2016, due to a conflict declared by District Attorney General Steve Crump. An investigation by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation and the Tennessee Department of Revenue into the conduct of Sheriff Eric Watson ensued.

On July 19, 2017, the results of that investigation were presented to the Bradley County Grand Jury which returned a Presentment against Sheriff Watson charging six (6) counts of violating T.C.A. Section 55-5-116. This law makes it a criminal offense to use or hold a document, such as an automobile title, that has been altered or forged. This Presentment was later superceded by a new presentment that cured a drafting discrepancy in the original presentment. The State of Tennessee filed Discovery in this case in late September, 2017, which in laymen's terms means the State turned over to the Defendant the evidence it planned to use at trial. Reciprocal Discovery from the Defendant was also demanded at this time.

The crux of the State's case revolved around the State's contention that Sheriff Watson, through his pursuit of the sale of automobiles purchased in Florida and brought to Tennessee for sale, made alterations to the titles of these automobiles and failed to pay certain fees and taxes required by law for the sale of automobiles purchased out of state. On December 29, 2017, counsel for Sheriff Watson provided copies of certain documents evidencing the payment of the aforementioned taxes and fees on December 13, 2016, to my office. Only yesterday was my office able to verify the authenticity of the provided records and since they were not in my office's possession at any time prior to December 29, 2017, these documents were not presented to the Bradley County Grand Jury.

Further, the Office of the Comptroller for the State of Tennessee completed its audit of the Bradley County Sheriff's Office in early December, 2017, and made no findings of any discrepancies.

After conferring with my staff and searching my own conscience, I will not proceed further with this case. Even though there may be technical violations of the law, the spirit of the law seeks to punish fraudulent conduct that deprives the State of Tennessee of its lawful taxes and fees and since Sheriff Watson rectified this failure prior to the seeking of the presentment, this case will be closed with a dismissal of the case on all counts.