



Press Release
September 15, 2003

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**PREBLE COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH AND RECOVERY BOARD DIRECTOR
CONVICTED ON ETHICS CHARGES**

On September 11, 2003, Preble County Common Pleas Judge David Abruzzo found Preble County Mental Health and Recovery Board Executive Director Carolyn Orr-Szoke guilty of ethics and falsification charges, after she pleaded no contest to these offenses pursuant to a plea agreement with the Special Prosecutor and the Ohio Ethics Commission.

Orr-Szoke was found guilty of authorizing or using her authority to secure a series of four contracts from April 1, 1998 through April 1, 1999 between the Preble County Mental Health and Recovery Board and Duvall & Associates, Inc. Her daughter was employed by Duvall & Associates and worked directly on these contracts. Due to the extent and nature of her daughter's involvement in the work, ethics laws prohibited Orr-Szoke as the public Board's Executive Director from using her position or participating in any manner in the Board hiring the company.

Special Prosecutor Andrew Berghausen stated, "This was a classic conflict of interest. The citizens of the County had no independent assurance they were receiving the best and most competitive services. Instead, the company that was hired used the Director's daughter to do the work. The plea agreement requires the Defendant to pay restitution toward the contract's cost."

Orr-Szoke was also found guilty of falsification for making material misrepresentations to the Ethics Commission concerning her daughter's employment relationship with Duvall & Associates in an advisory opinion request to the Commission made on November 24, 1998. She falsely sought advice about future contracts when, in fact, several of the contracts had already been signed and awarded. The Special Prosecutor initiated this charge.

Judge Abruzzo sentenced Orr-Szoke to thirty days in jail on each misdemeanor offense.

ordering that jail time be suspended and Orr-Szoke be placed on probation for one year. The terms of her probation include paying as restitution \$6750 to the Preble County Mental Health and Recovery Board and \$5000 to the Ohio Ethics Commission towards its costs of investigation and prosecution of this matter. In addition, she must resign from office by November 5, 2003, and is limited in her ability to hold employment as a public servant for a period of two years.

The charges resulted from an investigation by the Ohio Ethics Commission and Special Prosecutor Berghausen. Berghausen, who is an Assistant Hamilton County Prosecutor, was appointed as Special Prosecutor due to the potential conflict of interest by the Preble County Prosecutor's Office, who would normally represent the Preble County Board.

The Ohio Ethics Commission is an independent agency of state government, charged with interpreting and administering the Ohio Ethics Law. The Ethics Commission investigates alleged unethical conduct and refers violations to the appropriate prosecuting attorney for criminal prosecution. The Ethics Commission has been serving the public, and state and local governments, since its formation as part of the Ohio Ethics Law in 1973.