

July 30, 2018

It has been my honor and privilege to serve as Assessor of Property for Hamilton County since taking office in September of 2016. I take great pride in representing Hamilton County and her citizens. I am proud of the employees in this office and their commitment to doing an honest job with great integrity and character. For someone to flat out lie about the activities in this office is just wrong. I am very passionate about the people in this office and will defend them vigorously.

I called this press conference to address a serious accusation that Jonathan Mason and his campaign team made against me and the employees of this Office.

Property owners entrust us with their most precious treasure – their private property. This weekend between 3,000 – 5,000 households in District 30 received a negative attack mailer that says I have used the Assessor of Property's office for illegal activities- that is an outright lie, plain and simple. I am indignant that Jonathan Mason would attack the great employees in this office in order to score cheap political points for his failing campaign.

Regarding property taxes, the Assessor of Property does NOT set the tax rate. That duty is for the County Commission and the City Councils in this county.

I stand here today to defend this great office and the work my employees have done in the most recent reappraisal, as well as past reappraisals. Many of these employees have worked in this office for decades and were hired by the late Claude Ramsey and

my predecessor Bill Bennett. By making this accusation, Jonathan Mason is personally attacking their legacy.

He has again attacked the character of Esther Helton. If he wants to engage in a character debate, he better stick with me – Esther Helton is way out of his league.

Now, I will address the accusations made in the mailer that Jonathan Mason sent this weekend, as has been stated by Bill Lee, candidate for governor, “these type ads say a lot more about the person sending the ad than the person in the ad”. The subject property has been treated fairly as has all other property in Hamilton County to state otherwise is a blatant lie. The fair market value for this property in January 2017 was \$467,000. In April of this year the property sold for \$345,000 on the open market.

At no time as Assessor of Property have I personally changed any property values for anyone. Nor have I instructed anyone in this office to change a value for a political friend or foe. I cannot stress the point hard enough. We follow a strict set of state statutes and laws. The 2017 Reappraisal was well underway when I took office. We are currently in year two of the 2021 Reappraisal. You have my permission to question my staff if I directed them in any way to change a value. To prevent these types of questions in the future, last spring I made Gary Dawn our director of Quality Control. His function is to ensure that we are above board in all of our values.

I challenge Jonathan Mason and his campaign team to produce any material evidence that substantiates these charges. The truth is they can't because it does not exist. I will not stand by and allow Jonathan Mason and his team to malign this office and the great people who work here. I am extremely proud of my staff.

I have contacted legal counsel about what options I have as Assessor of Property to protect myself both professionally, personally and my office. I plan to explore every avenue and to the highest extent possible including libel, slander, defamation and any felonious charges. I will be contacting the Comptrollers Office about these unfounded allegations and seeking counsel as to how to proceed. The Comptrollers Office just completed the 2018 audit of my office. There were NO audit findings this year or last year. The Hamilton County Assessor's Office has never had an audit finding.

Thank you for your time.

Questions.