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Press Release Regarding Indictment and Arrest Of Willie Demps and Others

As a result of a request for a transitional audit by Superior Court Clerk, Danielle Forté, a former assistant chief deputy clerk and finance director of the Superior/State Court Clerk's office, Willie Demps, has been indicted regarding alleged financial improprieties while employed in the Superior Court Clerk's Office.

Demps abruptly retired from the clerk's office on December 2, 2019, in the midst of the transitional audit.

Forté, who was elected to the clerk's position in the November 2018 election, took office on November 14, 2018. On November 26, 2018, she immediately called for an investigation and an internal audit into cash deposits, recordkeeping related to money seized in crime raids by various local law enforcement agencies and the overall financial operations of the Clerk's office. In addition to the internal transitional audit, Forté requested that the Columbus Mayor, Skip Henderson ask the Georgia Bureau of Investigation to look into the matter and requested that the FBI inquire into potential missing funds.

To resolve the matter and ascertain a full accounting of missing funds, Ms. Forté has worked closely for months with the Columbus Mayor, City Attorney Clifton Fay, City Manager Isaiah Hugley, as well as the Muscogee County Sheriff's Office and the Columbus Police Department (CPD) Financial Crimes Unit. Ms. Forté also retained the services of an internal expert certified public accountant.

Ms. Forté said: "While I cannot comment specifically about the details in the indictment, suffice it to say that as Clerk of Superior Court, I am committed to adhering to the highest level of ethical standards and accountability and have instituted financial controls and sound measures to protect the integrity of the Superior Court Clerk's Office and to protect the citizens of Columbus, Georgia."

As this is an ongoing criminal investigation, no further comment will be made.