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## **As Shiawassee County Commissioner Recall Efforts Fall Short, Mark Zacharda for State House (MI-71) Encourages Responsible Replacements**

Wednesday, 02/02/2022: OWOSSO, MI—Although Mark Zacharda, Democratic candidate for State House District 71, is disappointed that recent efforts won't move forward to recall three Shiawassee County Commissioners who had improperly awarded themselves bonuses out of public funds, he advocates replacing them with responsible people through the remaining appropriate channels.

Zacharda, a county resident, strongly encourages Shiawassee voters to elect more responsible commissioners in November this year. "This is not a partisan issue—we need commissioners who take their responsibility to the community seriously," he said. "Voters in our county deserve representation that is accountable and honest. We need public servants in these important offices, not people who look to use their elected roles to enrich themselves."

Commissioner Jeremy Root (R-District 5) rightly resigned last month after a sexual harassment scandal. The remaining Board of Commissioners members will vote Thursday, February 3 to fill the empty seat. There is a history of filling vacancies on the board with cronies. Zacharda encourages the remaining members of the Board to appoint a responsible replacement member, who will uphold the Board's mission regarding fiscal responsibility to the entire Shiawassee County community, and will follow the Board's explicit mission to develop "policies and procedures to maintain public accountability and internal controls." [1]

County Commissioners held a closed session in July 2021 in which they voted to give themselves and other elected county officials thousands of dollars in COVID-19 "hazard pay" out of federal American Rescue Plan Act relief funds that were designed to help the local community. Marlene Webster (R-District 1) was the only board member to take responsibility, as she blew the whistle early on the matter. Without her action, the scandal might have remained buried.

"I commend Commissioner Webster for her action. But this situation should never have occurred," Zacharda said. "I would have hoped that fellow Shiawassee residents had a stronger sense of responsibility to our community. That money should have gone to the county employees like police and fire emergency workers, those serving in healthcare, and those at the lower end of the county wage spectrum. These people actually did serve our community and place themselves at risk during the pandemic— and they needed the assistance the most."

Of the \$557,000 disbursed last year, a large amount of the funds went to Commissioners and other elected officials. [2] Root received \$25,000; John Plowman (R-District 7) and Brandon Marks (R-District 4), received \$10,000 each; and the remaining members, Webster, Cindy Garber (R-District 6), Greg Brodeur (R-District 2), and Gary Holzhausen (R-District 3), received \$5,000 each. Webster, who blew the whistle, vowed to repay the money before any judiciary action. A Genesee County judge ordered the officials to repay the improperly received funds, and the Michigan Attorney General's Office opened a criminal investigation.

Local citizens had filed petitions last year to recall Root, Garber, and Plowman; however, they were unfortunately unable to gather enough signatures by the 4 p.m. deadline on Friday, January 28.

"Our community in Shiawassee County is filled with hard-working people who deserve better," Zacharda said. "I hope we're able to elect responsible County Commissioners on November 8."

[1] Shiawassee Board of Commissioners Mission Statement: <https://www.shiawassee.net/Board-of-Commissioners/>

[2] Argus-Press (Josh Champlin): [https://www.argus-press.com/news/news\\_local/article\\_547e2c7b-edb1-56ad-bf34-4d6d67722fe.html](https://www.argus-press.com/news/news_local/article_547e2c7b-edb1-56ad-bf34-4d6d67722fe.html)