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Former appointee sues Ficano, saying he was fired over whistle-blowing

By Christine MacDonald
The Detroit News

Detroit— Another former appointee is suing Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano, alleging he was fired after auditing the Roads Division and concluding the county was breaking the law.

Stephen MacDonald, a senior executive project manager who made \$123,000 a year, said he was hired in March 2011 to help the county save cash, but he was fired in January after producing a November 2011 audit of the Department of Public Service Roads Division.

The lawsuit wasn't specific about the findings but alleged they included violations of federal and state transportation laws, taxpayer fraud, corruption and collusion, gross mismanagement of taxpayer funds, accounting irregularities, and misstatement of inventory and expenses.

MacDonald's termination "was simply part of a well-devised scheme to silence MacDonald and bury his reports and recommendations," the whistle-blower lawsuit filed Tuesday in Wayne County Circuit Court reads.

County spokeswoman Brooke Blackwell issued a statement saying that MacDonald was an at-will employee who was laid off with 12 others Jan. 9 as "part of a cost-saving measure to help bring the county's budget in balance.

"We intend to defend the county against this kind of lawsuit from someone who is clearly out for personal gain," Blackwell said.

MacDonald maintains in the lawsuit that he had saved the county \$1.6 million after discovering the county was not properly billing local communities for roadwork and developed a plan to save the county another \$350 million.

Another of his road division audits found: \$27 million in overspending on road construction projects and \$43 million spent on engineering to complete \$96 million in road contract, according to the lawsuit.