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At hearing for ex-deputy charged with felonies, Contra Costa detective testifies ex-deputy had judges' e-signatures saved on thumb drive

Former judge calls revelation 'horrifying'

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MARTINEZ — A former Contra Costa Sheriff's deputy who was fired and charged with five felonies had stockpiled e-signatures of superior court judges on a thumb drive found in his patrol car, according to police testimony at his preliminary hearing Thursday.

Matthew Buckley, 42, of Pinole, has been charged with not just stealing two assault rifles from an Antioch resident in 2020, but also with forging documents with two judges' signatures in an attempt to cover up the thefts. But testimony by Buckley's old colleagues raise questions as to just how far the alleged forgery

According to the testimony of Contra Costa Sheriff's Sgt. Jonathan Kirkham, in August 2022, Buckley had been asked to teach a colleague, Sgt. Laurie Bailey, how to properly file and submit search warrant returns. Bailey would later tell investigators that during this training, Buckley presented her with a form — with her own signature — that Bailey never signed. When she demanded an explanation, Buckley allegedly responded, "It's fine, you know about it, so it's all good," according to Kirkham's testimony.

Later that month, Buckley was fired and arrested by his own employer for allegedly stealing two assault rifles from an Antioch man. The guns were taken during the service of a legitimate search warrant, but never booked into evidence, and ended up in a bag in Buckley's garage, police said.

Authorities also searched Buckley's patrol car, where they found several USB storage devices, including one found to contain "several" e-signatures by "multiple" Contra Costa Superior Court judges, including Judge Charles "Ben" Burch and Judge Wendy McGuire Coats, Detective Patrick Mazerski said on the witness stand Thursday. Police haven't specified exactly how many different judges' signatures were found.

It is common for judges to use e-signatures to sign authorizations for police to serve search warrants and seize property, meaning that any corrupt police officer who possessed such files would essentially have carte blanche to serve bogus warrants and steal property. Retired Santa Clara County Judge LaDoris Cordell said in an interview Friday that there is no legitimate reason for a police officer to possess judges' e-signatures.

"I'm assuming it's so he can get any order signed that he wants," Cordell said. "If this is true, it's absolutely horrific, and I wonder what kind of vetting went in to let this person enter law enforcement."

Buckley was a 15-year veteran of the sheriff's office who was well-respected by peers until the alleged crimes came to light, according to multiple law enforcement sources who know him. He was named the department's "Officer of the Year" in 2019 for his work the previous year.

Years ago, he also worked as a bailiff for Contra Costa District Attorney Diana Becton, a retired judge. Becton attempted to recuse her office from the prosecution but the California Attorney General passed it back to the Contra

Also found in Buckley's garage, along with the AR-15, were approximately two grams of methamphetamine found in an evidence bag with a man's first name on it, police testified Thursday. Buckley has not been charged with possessing the drugs.

At the end of Buckley's preliminary hearing, his attorney, Dirk Manoukian, contested some charges but not others. He said that Buckley had returned the upper parts of the guns to the Antioch resident but kept the lower components, and argued that meant Buckley was absolved of grand theft of a firearm on technical grounds.

"Disassembled parts are not firearms," Manoukian said. He later added: "Let's say he intended to steal the lowers. That is not grand theft of a firearm."

Judge Jon Rolefson, a retired Alameda County judge brought on after the entire Contra Costa County bench recused itself, agreed with prosecutor Chris Walpole, who argued that Buckley had to first steal the guns and take them home in order to disassemble them.

"I think there's a pretty good inference...that the attempt to steal was formed pretty quickly, because the weapons were never booked into evidence," Rolefson said Thursday. The judge ordered Buckley to stand trial on felony charges of grand theft of a firearm, possessing an assault weapon, filing false police reports and two counts of preparing false documents, as well as a single misdemeanor charge of destroying or concealing evidence.

A Contra Costa DA spokesman said the office will conduct a review of cases where Buckley was a material witness — similar to those being done due to a [massive, ongoing police corruption scandal](#) in East Contra Costa — which could result in convictions being overturned.



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