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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EMBEZZLER TRIPPED UP BY SOFTWARE SWITCH

A switch in the accounting and case management software uncovered the embezzlement scheme of a long time employee of the Housing Authority of the County of Merced. Investigators from the Merced County District Attorney's Office arrested Mark Anthony Wilson, 48, today at his residence in Atwater. The arrest of Wilson, 48, and a 15 year employee of the Housing Authority, followed the issuance of an arrest warrant by Merced County Superior Court Judge John Kiriara. Investigators took Wilson into custody for diverting public funds, embezzlement, and illegal loan sharking.

Wilson's diversion of public funds and embezzlement came to light in February when bank officials contacted the Housing Authority with questions regarding the payment of a check. Bank records showed that the sequence number of the check had already been used on another check written on the Housing Authority's account. In comparing these two checks with the same check number, Housing Authority officials discovered that Wilson had written a \$4,966 check to himself.

Housing Authority officials immediately contacted the District Attorney's office regarding their discovery. Wilson was confronted by his employer, and later by district attorney investigators, about this \$4,966 check. He admitted to having embezzled those funds, and to having embezzled on "five to six" other occasions, according to District Attorney Chief Investigator Pat Lunney.

Further investigation revealed that Wilson used his check scheme on at least 16 occasions, totaling about \$68,000, prior to the Housing Authority's new accounting and case management system's implementation, but only twice after. "It was on Wilson's second attempt, within the Housing Authority's new system, that he was tripped up," said Lunney. Case lead investigator, Supervising Investigator Wayne Hutton said, "Wilson did a remarkable job covering his tracks. It's clear his embezzlement, totaling over \$78,000, would have gone completely undiscovered had this new accounting system not been put in place."

Hutton added that his investigation also found that Wilson made at least five personal loans to people, during the same timeframe as his other crimes, in which Wilson charged up to nearly 70% interest. "Usury" (loan sharking) is a violation of Article 15, of the California Constitution, which, along with other laws and statutes, makes it illegal for a private person to charge more than 10% APR on certain loans.

Lunney advised that, "Usury laws were put in place to help stop criminals from preying on poor people who need to borrow a few dollars to make ends meet. It's wrong to force someone who needs to borrow \$6,500 to pay back nearly \$9,000 in just four months."