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## Wife, son defend Lively Principal Hildebrandt



*Woody Hildebrandt's attorney says school officials pressured Lively workers to file whistle-blower complaints*

Lively Technical Center principal Woody Hildebrandt's wife and son have given sworn statements that accusations of wrongdoing against him by two school employees are false, and his attorney says district officials pressured the pair of workers to file whistle-blower complaints.

Hildebrandt's son, Bailey Hildebrandt, said in an affidavit that the allegations by Keith Moore, a carpentry instructor, and Floyd "Mann" Roberts, a welding instructor, "are nothing more than attempts to cover, deflect and distract from their own wrongdoings." Hildebrandt's wife, Joni, said in an affidavit that the allegations are "manipulated and untrue."

Tallahassee attorney Tim Jansen, who is representing Woody Hildebrandt, said he delivered the affidavits to the State Attorney's Office on Friday. State Attorney Willie Meggs has said his office is investigating allegations of illegal activity at the technical school.

Roberts filed a whistle-blower letter with Leon County Schools on Oct. 23, accusing Hildebrandt of taking school-owned property for use at his property on U.S. Highway 90 east and ordering Roberts to assist him or face retaliation. Moore, who is Joni Hildebrandt's brother and Woody Hildebrandt's brother-in-law, leveled similar accusations in a whistle-blower letter filed Nov. 7.

"We have a witness who will come forward and say that school investigators pressured both Moore and Roberts to come forward to make these allegations before they filed these whistle-blower letters," Jansen said in an interview with the Tallahassee Democrat. Chris Petley, spokesman for Leon County Schools, said Jansen's statements are "false."

"No one's due process rights have been compromised," he said in an email. "The allegations against his client Mr. Hildebrandt are very serious in nature. Based on the seriousness of these allegations the information is being reviewed by law-enforcement authorities." Tallahassee attorney Steven R. Andrews, who is representing both Roberts and Moore, responded by saying, "We're fully cooperating with all investigations of alleged improprieties at Lively and will continue to do so and hope the truth comes out."

Woody Hildebrandt filed his own whistle-blower letter on May 30 alleging the district misused taxpayer dollars and violated competitive-bidding laws. A federal grand jury working with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Tallahassee and the FBI is investigating construction projects at 17 different Leon County schools dating back to 2007.

Jansen contends that Superintendent Jackie Pons tried to convince Hildebrandt not to file the letter. He said Pons, who used to be a close friend of Hildebrandt, spent two hours with Hildebrandt on the day he filed his letter trying to talk him out of it. He said Pons later that day went to Lively to meet with Hildebrandt again.

"We know for a fact that Mr. Pons tried to get Woody to not claim whistle-blower," Jansen said. "Our understanding is that Superintendent Pons did drive out there and handed Mr. Hildebrandt a new contract with a promotion the same day that Mr. Hildebrandt handed in his whistle-blower letter."

Hildebrandt didn't take the promotion, which Jansen said was Pons' "form of being sent to Siberia." Hildebrandt was recently placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of the investigation. Jansen said district officials changed the locks on his office door the day he was placed on leave.

Jansen further alleged that Pons is trying to undermine Woody Hildebrandt's credibility in retaliation for his filing of the whistle-blower letter.

"Mr. Pons and his legal team have interviewed Woody," he said, "and they clearly know he could be a potential witness against Mr. Pons."

Joni Hildebrandt denied allegations by Moore and Roberts that a large gate at the Hildebrandts' home was built with stolen school materials. She said Roberts contacted her family to see if they wanted a gate built at the property and that he assisted in building it, which she said has been a "work in progress" since 2009. She wrote that she purchased \$2,000 in materials to build the gate.

Roberts' whistle-blower letter alleged, among other things, that Woody Hildebrandt ordered him to buy cabinets using a School Board purchase order for use in a Tervis tumbler business operated during business hours at his home. Moore, in his whistle-blower letter, said he saw racks used for the business being built during school hours at Lively.

But Joni Hildebrandt said in her affidavit that Roberts showed up with the racks one day at her workshop and told her, "These will work better for you." She said she offered to pay for them, but he declined. She and Bailey Hildebrandt said Roberts claimed the racks were his. Bailey Hildebrandt, in his affidavit, denied allegations by Roberts that his father used district funds to buy \$4,000 in heavy-duty mats for his horse barn, saying he and his brother bought the mats on their own over time.

Jansen said he's hoping for a fair investigation and hasn't ruled out the possibility of asking for a special prosecutor.

"This is a very serious matter," he said, "and people's lives are at stake."

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