



**NEWS FROM:**  
**Office of Public Defender**  
**Matt Shirk, Fourth Circuit**  
[www.MattShirkPublicDefender.com](http://www.MattShirkPublicDefender.com)

**Contact: Matt Bisbee**  
**Public Information Officer**  
**Tel: (904)630-7350**  
[MPB@PD4.COJ.net](mailto:MPB@PD4.COJ.net)

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## **PD Office Wins Trial Involving International Romantic Relationship, Online Technologies, Thousands of Dollars and Interstate Delivery of a Fraudulent Check**

Jacksonville, FL: A Jacksonville man who worked in a routine data management position for a local company is fortunate to keep his career because of the zealous advocacy provided by the Office of Fourth Judicial Circuit Public Defender Matt Shirk. The State vs. William Sharp involved a client who was innocently thrust into an international scheme involving a fraudulent check. Assistant Public Defender Brenda Drake (pictured, left) led the defense which included APD Jon Lorimier (pictured, right); the team



successfully defended Mr. Sharp, which let him avoid conviction.

Mr. Sharp was charged with Uttering a check that had been altered, but the story began long before the alleged criminal incident took place. More than a year before his arrest, the client started a relationship with a woman in Ghana, Africa through a social networking website. That eventually grew into a more personal relationship which involved phone conversations and video meeting through technology like Skype. Mr. Sharp began making arrangements to enable his girlfriend

to visit the United States. She convinced him that she would be able to afford a visit if she could get a large sum of money she was owed by someone in New York. She could not receive that money in Ghana as it would likely be confiscated by the local government. He agreed to accept the money from the party in New York, but weeks after he deposited it in his account, his bank said the check was no good. There had been no indications that said check had been altered and, in fact, a bank employee testified that it would be "very, very difficult" for someone who was not an expert to know that it had.

The winning defense was based on convincing arguments and evidence put forth by Ms. Drake and Mr. Lorimier that the client simply did not know the check he deposited had previously been altered. The jury understood that Mr. Sharp was as much a victim here as was the bank and found him not guilty of the charge the state had filed against him.

“This case involved a large amount of sophisticated criminal activity, none of which was perpetrated by our client,” said Mr. Shirk. “The solid defense put forth by Brenda and John stuck to the facts and rightfully won over the jurors who acquitted our client. I’m thrilled by the excellent work we were able to do during this trial and I’m very happy about the positive outcome for Mr. Sharp.”