

## Rita Hunter gets year and a day in federal prison

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Former Jasper County Public Administrator Rita Hunter was sentenced to one year and one day in federal prison this morning during a sentencing hearing in Springfield. U.S. District Court Judge Dean Whipple, during the sentencing, chastised Hunter for repeatedly lying to federal officials over a three-year period. "Your conduct was very egregious. You took an oath to uphold the law and then you continually and repeatedly filed false reports to federal agencies," he told her. Ask to comment, Hunter raised no objection to the sentence. Her attorney had been arguing for probation, citing a heart condition of his client and noting that she also did not personally benefit from the false forms that were filed. Hunter, who held office from January 2005 through December 2008, pleaded guilty last November to document fraud, a charge related to illegally obtaining of federal benefits. The document fraud charge to which Hunter pleaded guilty was among 12 counts listed in a federal indictment handed up Dec. 14, 2011. The guilty plea was part of an agreement that called for the other 11 charges to be dropped, according to a statement issued by a federal prosecutor at the time of the plea. By pleading guilty, Hunter admitted to a scheme involving a total fraud of \$70,000 to \$120,000, according to the federal court. She directed her employees to submit materially false Medicaid applications for wards under the custody of the public administrator's office. The applications falsely stated that the wards had assets below the \$1,000 threshold to be eligible to receive Medicaid benefits, when in fact the wards had assets of more than \$1,000. Whipple also ordered Hunter and her bonding company to repay \$120,000 restitution to the federal agencies. Under federal statutes, Hunter was facing a sentence of up to five years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000 and an order of restitution.