

To: Rutherford County Ethics Committee

From: A Concerned Citizen

Date: November 10, 2025

Subject: Formal Ethics Complaint Requesting Investigation of Mayor Joe Carr

This letter serves as a formal complaint to the Rutherford County Ethics Committee. It details a series of actions by Rutherford County Mayor Joe Carr that appear to constitute significant violations of the public trust, the Rutherford County Code of Ethics, and Tennessee state law. We respectfully request a full and thorough investigation into these matters.

Based on the gravity of the evidence presented, we further request that the Committee refer its findings to the Rutherford County District Attorney's Office for investigation into potential official misconduct and to the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury for a review of the misuse of county funds, property, and personnel.

It is alleged that Mayor Joe Carr attempted to improperly influence the official duties of a county commissioner. Specifically, prior to the July 2024 ethics hearing concerning Property Assessor Rob Mitchell, Mayor Carr allegedly contacted Commissioner Robert Peay in an attempt to influence his perspective or actions related to the hearing. Such an act represents a serious breach of ethical standards, which demand that quasi-judicial proceedings remain free from undue influence, particularly from other elected officials. This action undermines the integrity and impartiality of the Ethics Committee's proceedings. We request the Committee investigate this alleged contact and its purpose.

There is direct evidence indicating that Mayor Carr is using his official office, located within the county courthouse, and county-paid employees to conduct a private business enterprise for personal financial gain. In a public social media post, Mayor Carr explicitly directs a potential customer on how to purchase honey from him.

In the post, a user asks, "Where is the best place to get it?" Mayor Carr replies: "I keep some honey at my office at the Courthouse. Rachel and Carla can help you if I'm not there."

This statement serves as an admission that Mayor Carr uses county property (his office) as a retail storeroom and point of sale for a personal business. Furthermore, it confirms that he directs county employees ("Rachel and Carla") to facilitate these private sales during their work hours. This conduct appears to be a clear violation of ethics rules prohibiting the use of public resources, time, and personnel for private financial gain.

Evidence compiled from a series of emails suggests a coordinated and politically motivated campaign by Mayor Carr, utilizing county resources and personnel, to discredit and slander another elected official, Property Assessor Rob Mitchell.

The "whistleblower" was sent to the mayor's home in January in investigate a sketching error and to remeasure every structure on the property. He omitted the inclusion of a 128 sq/ft greenhouse attached to the mayor's home. Codes never issued a citation nor has the mayor paid to the county the required permit and inspection fee. Codes is a department which reports to the county mayor.

This campaign involves a collaboration with the county's paid lobbyist, Will Denami, and the potential misuse of the county's Public Information Officer (PIO) to disseminate unverified and damaging information. The evidence indicates the following:

On January 9, 2024, after Assessor Mitchell issued a standard press release regarding county assessment growth, Mayor Carr forwarded it to lobbyist Will Denami with the instruction, "Tak a look at Rob's Press Release and ell me what yo ink." This action suggests the mayor was soliciting the assistance of a paid county lobbyist not for a public purpose, but to find a way to undermine and discredit the official work of another county department head.

An email sent from Mayor Carr's personal email address to Will Denami on Saturday, March 9, 2024, contained the exact text of a "whistleblower" complaint that was later filed against Assessor Mitchell's office. This same complaint was formally sent to the state by an employee, Richard Kincade, four days later, on March 12, 2024.

This timeline strongly suggests that the complaint did not originate organically from the employee, but was instead drafted or orchestrated by the Mayor's office and transmitted via the county lobbyist before being filed.

The "whistleblower" complaint strategically included a link to a Tennessee Star article published on February 9, 2024. This article contained personal information about a new hire in the Assessor's office that appears to have been improperly released from his employment application prior to his hiring. The coordinated use of this article in a complaint originating from the Mayor's office suggests a deliberate effort to use county resources and channels to amplify and legitimize slanderous allegations against Assessor Mitchell and his staff. It is alleged that the county PIO may have been used in the distribution or promotion of these narratives.

The actions detailed in this complaint, supported by the attached evidence, depict a pattern of behavior by Mayor Joe Carr that is inconsistent with the ethical obligations of his office. These allegations include attempting to influence a quasi-judicial hearing, using public property and staff for personal profit, and orchestrating a politically motivated smear campaign against another elected official using county resources.

This conduct erodes public trust and appears to violate multiple provisions of the Rutherford County Code of Ethics and state laws regarding official misconduct.

Therefore, we formally request that the Rutherford County Ethics Committee launch a full investigation into these allegations. We further urge the Committee to refer this matter, along with its findings, to the District Attorney's Office and the State Comptroller for a comprehensive investigation into potential criminal violations and misuse of public funds.

NOTE: Originally, the ethics complaint was submitted by a "concerned citizen." However, after a county employee allegedly contacted the citizen's place of work, Jason Bennett told WGNS that he was willing to have his name publicly released in connection with the filing.

Amendment to Ethics Complaint Filed November 10, 2025

Submitted by: Jason Bennett

Date: November 10, 2025

Subject: Supplemental Allegation of Retaliatory Conduct and Misuse of County Personnel by Mayor Joe Carr

This amendment supplements the ethics complaint filed earlier today regarding Mayor Joe Carr's alleged misuse of county resources, personnel, and office for personal and political purposes.

New Allegation: Retaliatory Use of County Personnel to Inquire About Complainant's Employment

On the afternoon of November 10, 2025—mere hours after the submission of my formal ethics complaint—a county employee, EMS director Chris Clark, contacted my employer to inquire about my employment status. The employee stated, and I'm paraphrasing because this was a phone call that lasted only briefly, "I have a situation boiling up in the county. Does Jason Bennett still work there?"

This action raises serious ethical and legal concerns:

- **Retaliation and Witness Intimidation:** The timing and phrasing of the inquiry suggest an attempt to intimidate or surveil me in response to my filing. This may constitute retaliation against a complainant in an official ethics proceeding, violating ethical standards and potentially state whistleblower protections.
- **Misuse of County Personnel:** Directing a county employee to make a personal inquiry unrelated to any legitimate government function is a misuse of public resources and may violate provisions of the Rutherford County Code of Ethics and Tennessee Code Annotated § 39-16-402 (Official Misconduct).
- **Improper Surveillance of Private Citizens:** The inquiry into my employment status, made without any lawful justification or public purpose, represents an inappropriate intrusion into my private affairs and raises questions about the mayor's intent and use of county authority.

This incident appears to be part of a broader pattern of behavior by Mayor Carr—using county personnel and resources to target, surveil, or retaliate against individuals who challenge his conduct. It further underscores the urgency of a full investigation into the misuse of county office and personnel.

Requested Action

I respectfully request that the Ethics Committee:

1. Investigate this incident as part of the broader complaint.
2. Determine whether county resources were used inappropriately.
3. Assess whether this action constitutes retaliation or witness intimidation.
4. Refer this matter to the District Attorney's Office and the Tennessee Comptroller for further review.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your commitment to upholding ethical standards in Rutherford County government.

Sincerely,
Jason Bennett
District 20 Resident