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Basement Finisher Charged with Theft

The owner of a basement finishing company was charged this week with five counts of theft by failure to make required disposition of property received, Acting Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri reported.

The charges against Charlie Johnston, age 47, of Robbinsville, owner of Basements 4 Less, relate to five victims in Mercer County. The homeowners in West Windsor, East Windsor and three in Robbinsville, paid Johnston for specific items and he never delivered. The complaints specifically allege that:

- Between July 24, 2013 and May 5, 2014, Johnston retained \$2,472 from a homeowner in West Windsor did not provide services agreed including the installation and finishing of QuietRock, the installation and finishing of hollow core Masonite doors, and the installation and finishing of a sump pump.
- Between October 17, 2013 and July 26, 2014, Johnston retained \$1,050 from a homeowner in East Windsor and did not provide services agreed including the delivery, installation and finishing of French doors and the delivery and installation of a railing.
- Between December 31, 2013 and September 9, 2014, Johnston retained \$1,950 from a homeowner in Robbinsville and did not provide services agreed including the relocation of a laundry room, and the delivery and installation of hollow core Masonite doors.

- Between January 30, 2014 and October 1, 2014, Johnston retained \$2,000 from a homeowner in Robbinsville and did not provide services agreed including the delivery and installation of hollow core Masonite doors and the installation of laminate flooring.
- Between March 8, 2014 and September 18, 2014, Johnston retained \$600 from a homeowner in Robbinsville and did not provide services agreed including the installation and finishing of drywall and painting.

Each charge is a third-degree offense that carries a penalty of three to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$15,000.

The charges are the result of referrals to the prosecutor's office by the Mercer County Division of Consumer Affairs and investigation by Detective Marc Masseroni of the prosecutor's Economic Crime Unit. The county DCA received numerous complaints from throughout New Jersey. DCA Chief Donna Giovannetti and her staff began an initial investigation and later forwarded cases that involved victims residing in Mercer County to the prosecutor's office. The case is being prosecuted by Senior Assistant Prosecutor James Scott, chief of the ECU.

Additionally, there is a pending civil investigation by the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs into Johnston's business dealings with consumers throughout the entire state.

Despite having been charged, all persons are presumed innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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