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Gulfport judge resigns

ROBIN FITZGERALD, rfitzgerald@sunherald.com

GULFPORT -- Chief Judge William "Bill" Atchison of Gulfport Municipal Court has resigned and been accepted for a pretrial diversion program to address his pending charges of prescription forgery.

Atchison, 49, has been on administrative leave since his arrest in February. He was placed on house arrest with a GPS monitor after the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics arrested him on nine counts of prescription forgery.

His attorney, **Wayne Woodall**, hand-delivered a letter of resignation to the office of Mayor Brent Warr on Friday. The letter expressed Atchison's "deep regret" in his decision to voluntarily resign. The mayor was on vacation Friday.

Woodall said Atchison will re-enter private practice.

Gulfport Chief Administrative Officer John Kelly described Atchison as "very capable and hard working judge."

"We hope he is able to get his legal matters resolved and is able to practice his craft in some other capacity," Kelly said. "We wish both he and his family well."

The MBN alleges that Atchison in April 2007 obtained a 15-day supply of hydrocodone, a narcotic pain-reliever, from one doctor and, five days later, obtained a prescription from another doctor. MBN alleges that 14 days later, Atchison filled a third prescription from a different doctor.

According to **Woodall**, Atchison was being treated by one doctor for kidney stones and still had some pain medication prescribed by that doctor when a doctor treating him for TMJ, a jaw-joint problem, gave him additional pain medication, **Woodall** said.

Woodall said Atchison "is not an 'addict' nor is he 'dependent' on the medication. It is our position that it is not 'illegal' to obtain medication from a physician if the patient does not intentionally and deliberately commit an act of fraud or deceit upon the physician to obtain the medication."

The pretrial diversion program, run by the District Attorney's Office, provides intense supervision to first-time offenders of non-violent crimes in lieu of criminal prosecution. Those accepted for the program waive the right to a grand jury review.

Justice Court Judge Gene Dedeaux signed an order Friday to no longer require Atchison to be on house arrest. The order notes Atchison underwent a psychological evaluation and a drug screening. The evaluation "finds that the defendant does not abuse his prescription medication (and) does not abuse alcohol or other substances," the order states.

Atchison was not incarcerated after his arrest. Sheriff Melvin Brisolara said investigators were concerned that Atchison could be in danger from inmates he had sent to jail.

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