



## COMPTROLLER'S INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

### Lifeline to Success

*August 28, 2025*

**Jason E. Mumpower**  
*Comptroller of the Treasury*



**DIVISION OF INVESTIGATIONS**



JASON E. MUMPOWER  
*Comptroller*

August 28, 2025

Memphis City Council  
125 North Main Street #514  
Memphis, TN 38103

Memphis City Council:

The Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury conducted an investigation of selected records of Lifeline to Success, and the results are presented herein.

Copies of this report are being forwarded to Governor Bill Lee, the State Attorney General, the District Attorney General of the 30<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, the District Attorney General appointed *Pro Tem*, certain state legislators, and various other interested parties. A copy of the report is available for public inspection in our Office and may be viewed at <http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/ia/>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. E. Mumpower", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jason E. Mumpower  
Comptroller of the Treasury

JEM/MLC

# INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

## Lifeline to Success

The Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury investigated allegations of malfeasance related to Lifeline to Success. The investigation was initiated after receiving an allegation that the Executive Director was misusing grant funds for personal use. The investigation was limited to selected records for the period January 1, 2020, through August 31, 2024. The District Attorney General of the 30<sup>th</sup> Judicial District recused, and the results of the investigation were communicated with the Tennessee District Attorneys General Conference, who was appointed as *Pro Tem* in this matter pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 8-7-106.

### BACKGROUND



Lifeline to Success (Lifeline) is a nonprofit organization located in Memphis, Tennessee (Shelby County), established in 2009 to provide re-entry services to ex-offenders to help them become productive members of society and reduce recidivism. The program includes daily classes teaching ex-offenders job training, life skills, and social services, and a blight patrol team that performs cleanup projects throughout Shelby County. As of 2023, Lifeline had five blight patrol team members in their program, along with one front office employee. However, Lifeline management advised that the program could handle up to 50 team members. Investigators were also advised by Lifeline

management that they did not employ any professional counselors in their program.

Lifeline is funded through various sources, including revenue (funds provided to Lifeline upon completion of a service), grants, and donor funds. Between January 1, 2020, and August 31, 2024, investigators identified over 100 funding sources. From these sources, Lifeline received a total of \$3,819,022.88 in revenue, grants, and donor funds.

DeAndre Brown is the founder of Lifeline. Previously, DeAndre Brown taught daily classes at Lifeline. Currently, he serves as the Executive Director of the Shelby County Office of Re-Entry. DeAndre Brown was appointed as Acting Administrator and Executive Director on August 1, 2021, before being officially appointed on February 16, 2022.

Vinessa Brown (DeAndre Brown's wife) serves as Lifeline's Executive Director and oversees the day-to-day operations. As Executive Director, Vinessa Brown is responsible for managing the

payroll for Lifeline employees and blight patrol members, writing checks daily to pay vendors, and soliciting donors.

## RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION

### 1. DEANDRE BROWN AND VINESSA BROWN MISAPPROPRIATED FUNDS TOTALING AT LEAST \$626,858.63

Between January 2020 and August 2024, DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown knowingly misappropriated Lifeline funds totaling at least \$626,858.63 by receiving improper compensation, using the Lifeline debit card for personal purchases, and diverting funds to other entities as follows:

#### A. DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown received improper compensation totaling at least \$285,600.93

Lifeline is funded through various sources, including multiple grants designated for specific purposes, such as re-entry services. While some grants allowed DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown to receive compensation from Lifeline, grants from the City of Memphis, Shelby County (the county), the State of Tennessee, and the Department of Justice did not. Investigators reviewed the grant funding received by Lifeline to determine if those funds were used in accordance with the grant terms. Based on analyses of the grant contracts and the Lifeline bank account, investigators determined that DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown received at least \$285,600.93 in improper compensation.

DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown received regular Lifeline compensation and Lifeline bank transfers to their personal joint bank account. They also received funds electronically through online payment apps such as CashApp and PayPal. Investigators determined that all compensation and bank transfers were processed by Vinessa Brown.

Investigators also determined that Lifeline violated the conflict-of-interest clause related to a \$50,000 grant received from the county. The contract specifically states that the grantee warrants that no part of the total grant amount shall be paid directly or indirectly to any officer or employee of the county. The grant check awarded by the county was deposited on July 16, 2024. Vinessa Brown issued a check to DeAndre Brown on the same day for \$2,416.67 and deposited it into their personal joint bank account (**Refer to Exhibit 1**).

#### Exhibit 1

The image shows a check from Lifeline to Success, Inc. to Mr. DeAndre Brown. The check is dated 07/16/2024 and is for the amount of \$2,416.67. The check is issued by Hope Federal Credit Union. The check number is 80229. The check is payable to Mr. DeAndre Brown. The check is signed by Vinessa Brown. The check is dated 07/16/2024. The check is for the amount of \$2,416.67. The check is issued by Hope Federal Credit Union. The check number is 80229. The check is payable to Mr. DeAndre Brown. The check is signed by Vinessa Brown.

*Check issued to DeAndre Brown after receiving a \$50,000 grant award from Shelby County*

Vinessa Brown stated to investigators that compensation for her and her husband was not written into the grant budgets. However, she did consider their payments from Lifeline to be compensation. Vinessa Brown stated that she and DeAndre Brown determined their rate of pay by performing a Google search for average compensation for their respective positions and then paying themselves below the average. Investigators were not provided with any documentation to support how the rate of pay was determined.

Vinessa Brown also stated that after DeAndre Brown began working for the county in 2021, he continued doing training classes at Lifeline. Lifeline employees told investigators that after DeAndre Brown began working for the county, he was rarely present at Lifeline, with one employee stating that sometimes he would come in on Thursdays for 30 to 45 minutes. However, investigators confirmed that DeAndre Brown continued to receive regular compensation from Lifeline through August 2024.

Based on an analysis of the Lifeline bank account, investigators determined that DeAndre and Vinessa Brown deposited \$10,000 from their personal joint bank account back into Lifeline. Therefore, this amount is accounted for in the calculation of their compensation.

#### **Summary of Compensation Misappropriations by DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown**

Compensation Totals by Year	
Calendar Year	Amount
2020	\$ 77,192.17
2021	34,818.32
2022	56,462.52
2023	38,129.80
2024*	88,998.12
Less: Funds Deposited Back into Lifeline	(10,000.00)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$285,600.93</b>

*\*Payments through August 31, 2024*

#### **B. DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown used the Lifeline debit cards for personal purchases totaling at least \$256,367.49**

Investigators determined that DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown used the Lifeline debit cards to make personal purchases with grant funds designated solely for Lifeline's re-entry mission. Vinessa Brown acknowledged that only she and DeAndre Brown had debit cards for the Lifeline checking account. These personal purchases included numerous meals, purchases at retail stores such as Coach and Barnes & Noble, personal services such as payments to a hair stylist, and monthly recurring payments to ATC Fitness, Glide Xpress car wash, and OnStar. Investigators also identified personal purchases, for lodging and travel, including a trip to Jamaica taken by DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown (**Refer to Exhibit 2**).



Exhibit 2

Balance Due	:	7,914.29
Balance Due Date	:	JANUARY 18, 2022
The credit card used for the deposit will also be charged on balance due date for balance amount.		
ANY CHANGES TO TRAVEL DATE, RESORT OR ROOM CATEGORY, WILL REQUIRE REVISED PRICING TO CURRENT RATES AT THE TIME OF THE CHANGE, THIS MAY INCREASE OR DECREASE THE COST OF YOUR TRIP. <u>VJB</u>		
<b>BOOKING INFORMATION:</b>		
Resort	:	Sandals Montego Bay
Country	:	Jamaica
Room Category	:	M1 (Beachfront Millionaire One Bedroom Butler Suite with Outdoor Tranquility Soaking Tub)


02/03	Withdrawal Debit Card Signature Debit	-7,914.29
02/02 203387347930 7011 UNIQUE VAC/REP OF SAND		

***Sandals Montego Bay (Jamaica) Resort confirmation detailing a balance due of \$7,914.29 and corresponding Lifeline bank statement showing final payment of \$7,914.29***

Vinessa Brown stated to investigators that she and DeAndre Brown used Lifeline funds for personal use. She advised that she wrote checks to pay their mortgage, and these payments were in lieu of receiving compensation. Vinessa Brown also acknowledged that the Lifeline funds should not have been used to pay for their vacation to Jamaica. Vinessa Brown stated that they would pay back any funds that were used improperly.

Investigators also determined that DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown purchased season tickets to the Memphis Grizzlies (**Refer to Exhibit 3**) and Memphis Tigers college football and basketball games with Lifeline funds. Investigators confirmed that while employees were able to attend Memphis Grizzlies games occasionally, only DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown used the two season ticket seats purchased by Lifeline. As season ticket holders, DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown received 14 free Grizzlies tickets in a different section of the FedExForum, and employees sat in those seats.

Exhibit 3

 LIFELINE TO SUCCESS, INC. DEANDRE AND VINESSA BROWN 901.729.6537 1647 DELLWOOD AVENUE MEMPHIS, TN 38127-1347	Hope Federal Credit Union 3046 Harvester Lane Memphis Tennessee 38127	22723
	01/22/2021	
PAY TO THE ORDER OF Memphis Grizzlies	\$ **4,000.00	DOLLARS Photo Safe Deposit® Details on Back
Four thousand and 00/100*****		
MEMO Account LIFEline to Success /DeAndre and Vinessa I	Memphis Grizzlies 191 Beale Street Memphis, TN 38103 United States	We look beyond the fault... AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE

***Lifeline check for Memphis Grizzlies season tickets***

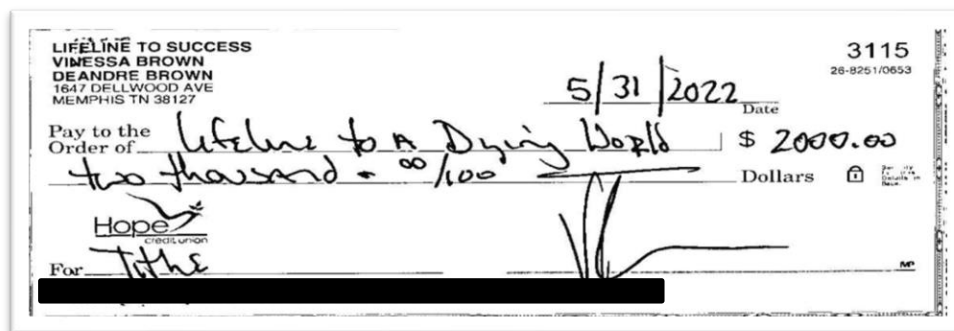
Vinessa Brown stated that she and DeAndre Brown used Lifeline funds for personal expenditures, and she said it was because they didn't write checks to themselves as compensation. She stated that if they didn't get paid, to her, it made sense to use Lifeline funds

for personal use. However, investigators determined both DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown received regular compensation from Lifeline as explained in Finding 1A.

**C. DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown diverted Lifeline funds totaling \$81,740.21 to Lifeline to a Dying World Ministries**

In addition to founding Lifeline, DeAndre Brown is a minister and founded a church called Lifeline to a Dying World Ministries (Dying World). Investigators confirmed the only connection between Dying World and Lifeline is that Dying World has weekly services in the Lifeline building each Sunday. Analysis of the Dying World bank account revealed that DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown deposited Lifeline funds totaling \$24,939.21 to the Dying World bank account through online transfers and checks (**Refer to Exhibit 4**). Vinessa Brown acknowledged to investigators that the Dying World bank account was used for transportation, Sunday food, communion, and financial gifts to Pastor DeAndre Brown. As Lifeline's mission is to provide re-entry services to former offenders, investigators could not determine any purpose for these expenditures or transfers to the Dying World bank account.

**Exhibit 4**



***Check issued from the Lifeline account by Vinessa Brown for tithes to a Dying World***

While analyzing the Dying World bank account, investigators identified various deposits associated with work performed by Lifeline's blight patrol team, along with donor funds. Investigators determined that funds totaling \$56,801 intended for Lifeline were diverted into the Dying World bank account instead of being paid directly to Lifeline.

**D. DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown diverted Lifeline funds totaling \$3,150 to Lifeline Services**

Investigators determined that Deandre Brown and Vinessa Brown diverted \$3,150 of Lifeline funds to a separate for-profit account called Lifeline Services (Services). The Services bank account was created, according to a statement by Vinessa Brown, to secure contracts with TruGreen, a landscaping company. The attempt to secure contracts with TruGreen, according to Vinessa Brown, "didn't work out and (Services) was short-lived." The deposits from Lifeline to Services were made from February 2020 to January 2021. Investigators determined these transactions were not associated with the re-entry mission and objectives of Lifeline.

**Summary of Total Misappropriations by DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown**

Description	Amount
A. Improper Compensation	\$ 285,600.93
B. Personal Purchases	256,367.49
C. Lifeline to a Dying World Ministries	81,740.21
D. Lifeline Services	3,150.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 626,858.63</b>

**2. DEANDRE BROWN AND VINESSA BROWN MADE QUESTIONABLE DISBURSEMENTS TOTALING AT LEAST \$755,307.81**

In addition to the misappropriation described in Finding 1, investigators determined that DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown made questionable disbursements from the Lifeline bank account totaling at least \$755,307.81. Investigators could not determine if these purchases were in furtherance of Lifeline's mission to provide re-entry services. The questionable disbursements consisted of CashApp transactions, Amazon purchases, eBay purchases, numerous restaurant transactions, and payments to Memphis Light Gas & Water (MLGW).

When questioned about some of the disbursements, Vinessa Brown stated that Lifeline would pay blight patrol members through CashApp if they could not pick up their check in person. She also stated Lifeline would pay members' electric bills if needed. However, she could not provide any documentation to support these claims. Without supporting documentation, investigators could not determine if these disbursements were used for the exclusive benefit of Lifeline or its participants, therefore any or all of these questionable disbursements could be deemed misappropriated.

On August 26, 2025, the Shelby County Grand Jury indicted DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown on three counts of Theft of Property over \$250,000, two counts of Theft of Property over \$60,000, two counts of Computer Fraud over \$60,000, two counts of Computer Fraud over \$10,000, two counts of Money Laundering, and one count of Official Misconduct.

The charges and allegations contained in the indictment are merely accusations of criminal conduct, and not evidence. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt and convicted through due process of law.

[Lifeline to Success Investigation Exhibit](#)



## INTERNAL CONTROL AND COMPLIANCE DEFICIENCIES

Our investigation revealed deficiencies in internal control and compliance, some of which contributed to DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown's ability to perpetrate their misappropriation without prompt detection. These deficiencies included:

**Deficiency 1: Lifeline did not comply with regulatory and governance standards due to its failure to maintain an adequate board of directors, as required by the State of Tennessee's nonprofit governance laws**

Lifeline did not comply with applicable governance standards due to failure of its board of directors to meet the operational requirements set forth in the Tennessee Nonprofit Corporations Act found in Title 48 of the Tennessee Code, which covers corporations and associations, specifically non-profit corporations, and discusses laws covering a range of topics, including the formation, structure, and operation of a nonprofit corporation.

Investigators spoke with several Lifeline board members. One board member advised that he joined the board near either the end of 2020 or the beginning of 2021. This time frame would have been before DeAndre Brown began employment with the Shelby County Office of Re-Entry. The board members advised that Lifeline board meetings were all virtual meetings; they never met in person. The meetings were conducted in a general and informal manner; there was no approval of board minutes, no discussion of Lifeline policies and procedures, nor any discussion of compensation for DeAndre Brown or Vinessa Brown from Lifeline.

Without an adequate and engaged board, Lifeline is at an increased risk of poor oversight and financial mismanagement. This threatens Lifeline's operational integrity, its ability to maintain its 26 U.S.C.A. § 501c(3) tax-exempt status, and its ability to secure public (local, state, and federal) funding, which jeopardizes Lifeline's efforts to reduce recidivism and support re-entry in Memphis, Tennessee.

The failure of the board of directors to maintain adequate operational standards played a key role in DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown's ability to misappropriate funds and make questionable expenditures.

**Deficiency 2: Lifeline failed to maintain proper accounting records**

General ledger account balances for cash on hand, cash in the bank, collections, payroll, and payment of expenditures were not maintained by DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown, along with other pertinent records (e.g., timesheets). Lifeline used manual checks to pay their employees and for Lifeline expenditures. Check registers and bank statements were the only accounting records maintained by Lifeline. Lifeline did not maintain proper timesheets or general ledgers, and monthly reconciliations were not performed.

Sound business practices dictate that financial records and accounts should be reviewed for accuracy and completeness, and all general ledger accounts should be reconciled in a timely manner. The failure to properly maintain accounting records on a current basis diminishes the

usefulness of the financial records as a management tool, results in a loss of accounting control, and increases the risk that errors will not be discovered and corrected in a timely manner. These deficiencies can be attributed to a lack of management oversight and the failure of management to take proper responsibility for the accounting records.

**Deficiency 3: Lifeline did not effectively implement accounting and internal control policies and procedures**

Lifeline failed to establish and implement reasonable procedures for accounting, controlling, and safeguarding funds to ensure sound business practices for Lifeline. Establishing sound accounting and internal control procedures ensures that funds and other assets are safeguarded against waste, loss, unauthorized use, or misappropriation.

**Deficiency 4: Lifeline violated the conflict-of-interest clause noted in a contract between the county and Lifeline**

As an employee of the county, DeAndre Brown violated the conflict-of-interest clause related to a \$50,000 grant received from the county. As detailed in Finding 1A, investigators confirmed that a grant check was deposited on July 16, 2024, and Vinessa Brown issued a check to DeAndre Brown that same day for \$2,416.67 and deposited it into their personal bank account. The contract specifically stated that the grantee warrants that no part of the total grant amount shall be paid to any officer or employee of the county as wages, compensation, or gifts in exchange for acting as officer, agent, employee, subcontractor, or consultant to the grantee in connection with any work contemplated or performed relative to the grant contract. Failure to comply with the terms and conditions of the grant contract allowed DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown to misappropriate and abuse funding provided to Lifeline by the county without detection.

**Deficiency 5: Lifeline violated the funding agreement clause with the City of Memphis**

Lifeline violated the funding agreement clause between the City of Memphis and Lifeline. Section 1 – Funding, of each executed funding agreement between the City of Memphis and Lifeline states that “The Lifeline to Success, Inc. hereby agrees to use funding granted by the Memphis City Council for the overall mission and core objectives of the Lifeline to Success, Inc., as presented in the request to the City Council of Memphis.” Failure to comply with the terms and conditions of the funding agreements allowed DeAndre Brown and Vinessa Brown to misappropriate and abuse funding provided to Lifeline by the City of Memphis without detection.