Herald-Star

LOCAL NEWS

Defendants in EGCC case plead not guilty

By **LINDA HARRIS** October 15, 2026 4 min read



Linda Harris IN COURT — Appearing before Jefferson County Common Pleas Judge Michelle Miller Wednesday, were, from left, Attorney Karl Schneider; defendants Nicole Rowe Colclasure, Michael J. Perik and Michael Geoghegan; and attorneys David Axelrod and Bradley Bardin.

STEUBENVILLE -- Former Eastern Gateway Community College President Mike Geoghegan and two

alleged co-conspirators entered pleas of not guilty Wednesday before their attorneys settled in for an almost 60-minute-long hearing on what, if any, contact the three of them can have with each other, current and former employees and potential witnesses without their lawyers being present.

The state alleges the defendants -- Geoghegan, Michael J. Perik and Nicole Rowe Colclasure -- were part of a criminal enterprise illegally pocketing millions of dollars meant to help disadvantaged students pay for their education, costing the state, federal government and taxpayers at least $20 million. Their 24-count indictments detail allegations of aggravated theft, theft in office, tampering with records, telecommunications fraud, money laundering, receiving stolen property, bribery and having an unlawful interest in a public contract.

The indictment, returned a week ago by a special grand jury, alleges the trio diverted federal aid dollars meant for disadvantaged students into their own pockets.

Sam Kirk and Thomas Anger, special investigators with the state auditor's office, told Jefferson County Common Pleas Judge Michelle Miller they had no objection to releasing the defendants on their own recognizance, provided they surrendered their passports and had no unsupervised contact with anyone associated with the case, including each other.

Attorneys for the defense -- David Axelrod, Karl Schneider and Bradley Barbin -- balked at the restrictions, however, pointing out Perik and Rowe Colclasure are partners in an IT firm and must talk several times a week and have "one regular scheduled meeting with a number of people about potential business opportunities." Perik said he also talks "multiple times a day" with Daniel Jones, a potential witness against him and his partner in a trucking firm.

While each of the three defendants has retained his or her own attorney, they told Miller they're planning to assert a common defense -- also known as a joint defense -- so they can map out a unified strategy to fight the charges.

Kirk and Anger told the judge they're "comfortable with defendants communicating with Jones (and another witness, Colclasure's boss in another company) as long as it's limited to the business they're engaged in, but with respect to each other we still would request that they go through their counsel in communicating."

"To be clear, they're not to discuss anything about this case," Miller said, telling the defendants they must have an independent party participating who can attest their conversations both in person and over the phone don't stray into forbidden territory "so it's not a private conversation."

“The court understands the common defense provision of the Sixth Amendment,” she added. “The court also understands that the state doesn’t want any spoliation of evidence or interfering or obstruction with the process as it stands.”

Miller told the defense attorneys it’s their responsibility to monitor interactions among the three defendants and if they can’t do it themselves, to ensure a paralegal or someone else in their firms does so on their behalf.

“I don’t think it’s such an infringement, based upon the evidence and what the state has produced thus far,” she said. “I think their request is reasonable and the court is going to adopt (it.) So, no communications unless it is with counsel or counsel’s (designee) -- a paralegal, a junior associate, a secretary -- I don’t care who, but it has to be someone else. If the court learns that (they) were discussing this case outside the presence of the appropriate people, the sanctions will be severe (and) could include revocation of bond and sitting in jail while this (case) is pending.”

Kirk and Anger, meanwhile, said there are “millions of records” involved, so the discovery stage -- when evidence and information about witnesses is exchanged -- “is going to be voluminous.” They pointed out many of the documents were seized from EGCC “and there is one consideration, we believe that there may be some records in our possession that may include attorney-client communications, so we’ve engaged an outside firm to do a point review of that and pull those out so we don’t inadvertently provide those to the wrong (parties.) That’s really the only thing ahead of us supplying all of the records to them (but) we can do it in stages.”

Miller scheduled the pretrial status conference for Dec. 17.