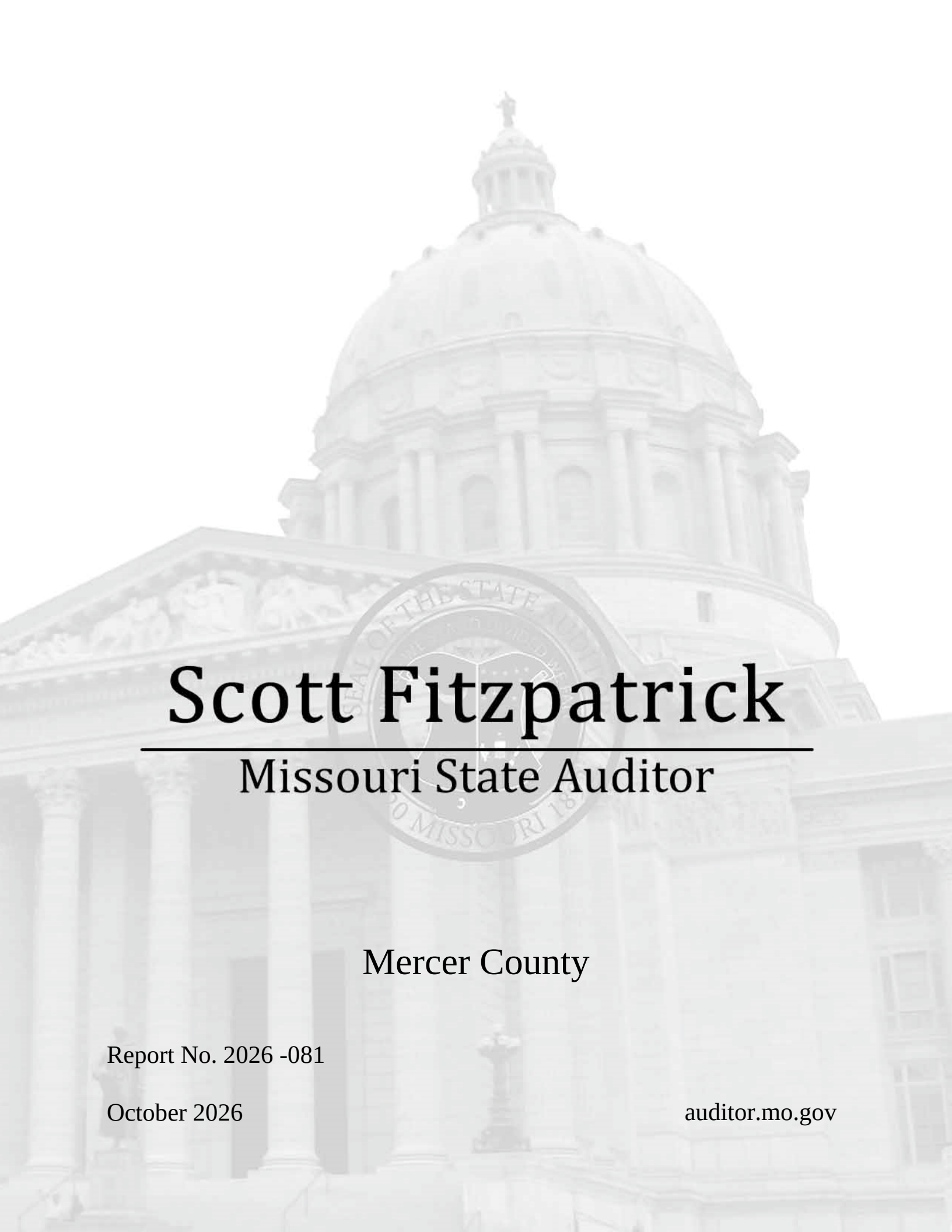




Scott Fitzpatrick

Missouri State Auditor

Mercer County

Report No. 2026 -081

October 2026

auditor.mo.gov



CITIZENS SUMMARY

Findings in the audit of Mercer County

Sheriff's Controls and Procedures	The Sheriff has not segregated accounting duties or performed adequate supervisory reviews of detailed accounting records. The Office Administrator is primarily responsible for receipting, recording, and depositing receipts; making disbursements; and billing for paper service. The Sheriff's Office Administrator does not prepare bank reconciliations or monthly lists of liabilities for the general account. Sheriff's office personnel do not maintain a complete and accurate seized property inventory listing and do not conduct periodic physical inventories of seized property.
Public Administrator's Annual Settlements	The Public Administrator does not file annual settlements timely. A review of all the cases the Public Administrator was responsible for as of December 31, 2024, found all 10 settlements due during the audit period were not filed timely. Filing delays ranged from 31 to 297 days, limiting the court's ability to oversee case administration.
Electronic Communication Policy	The county's Computer and Electronic Technology Usage Policy did not address records management and retention in compliance with the Missouri Secretary of State Records Services Division guidance, as approved by the Missouri Local Records Commission.
Electronic Data Security	Controls over the Sheriff's computers are not sufficient. As a result, county records are not adequately protected and are susceptible to unauthorized access or loss of data. The Sheriff's office does not require a minimum number of characters for its passwords.
Additional Comments	Because counties are managed by several separately elected individuals, an audit finding made with respect to one office does not necessarily apply to the operations in another office. The overall rating assigned to the county is intended to reflect the performance of the county as a whole. It does not indicate the performance of any one elected official or county office.

In the areas audited, the overall performance of this entity was **Fair**.*

*The rating(s) cover only audited areas and do not reflect an opinion on the overall operation of the entity. Within that context, the rating scale indicates the following:

- Excellent:** The audit results indicate this entity is very well managed. The report contains no findings. In addition, if applicable, prior recommendations have been implemented.
- Good:** The audit results indicate this entity is well managed. The report contains few findings, and the entity has indicated most or all recommendations have already been, or will be, implemented. In addition, if applicable, many of the prior recommendations have been implemented.
- Fair:** The audit results indicate this entity needs to improve operations in several areas. The report contains several findings, or one or more findings that require management's immediate attention, and/or the entity has indicated several recommendations will not be implemented. In addition, if applicable, several prior recommendations have not been implemented.
- Poor:** The audit results indicate this entity needs to significantly improve operations. The report contains numerous findings that require management's immediate attention, and/or the entity has indicated most recommendations will not be implemented. In addition, if applicable, most prior recommendations have not been implemented.

Mercer County

Table of Contents

State Auditor's Report	2
------------------------	---

Management Advisory	
Report - State Auditor's	
Findings	
1. Sheriff's Controls and Procedures	4
2. Public Administrator's Annual Settlements.....	7
3. Electronic Communication Policy.....	7
4. Electronic Data Security.....	8

Organization and Statistical	9
Information	



SCOTT FITZPATRICK

MISSOURI STATE AUDITOR

County Commission
and
Officeholders of Mercer County

We have audited certain operations of Mercer County in fulfillment of our duties under Section 29.230, RSMo. The scope of our audit included, but was not necessarily limited to, the year ended December 31, 2024. The objectives of our audit were to:

1. Evaluate the county's internal controls over significant management and financial functions.
2. Evaluate the county's compliance with certain legal provisions.
3. Evaluate the economy and efficiency of certain management practices and procedures, including certain financial transactions.

Our methodology included reviewing minutes of meetings, written policies and procedures, financial records, and other pertinent documents; interviewing various personnel of the county, and performing sample testing using haphazard and judgmental selection, as appropriate. The results of our sample testing cannot be projected to the entire populations from which the test items were selected. We obtained an understanding of internal control that is significant to the audit objectives and planned and performed procedures to assess internal control to the extent necessary to address our audit objectives. We also obtained an understanding of legal provisions that are significant within the context of the audit objectives, and we assessed the risk that illegal acts, including fraud, and violations of applicable contract, grant agreement, or other legal provisions could occur. Based on that risk assessment, we designed and performed procedures to provide reasonable assurance of detecting instances of noncompliance significant to those provisions.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

The accompanying Organization and Statistical Information is presented for informational purposes. This information was obtained from the county's management and was not subjected to the procedures applied in our audit of the county.

For the areas audited, we identified (1) deficiencies in internal controls, (2) noncompliance with legal provisions, and (3) the need for improvement in management practices and procedures. The accompanying Management Advisory Report presents our findings arising from our audit of Mercer County.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Scott Fitzpatrick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "S" and "F".

Scott Fitzpatrick
State Auditor

Mercer County

Management Advisory Report

State Auditor's Findings

1. Sheriff's Controls and Procedures

Controls and procedures in the Sheriff's office need improvement. The office collected money for civil paper service, concealed carry weapon permits, and other miscellaneous receipts totaling approximately \$12,000 during the year ended December 31, 2024.

1.1 Segregation of duties

The Sheriff has not segregated accounting duties or performed adequate supervisory reviews of detailed accounting records. The Office Administrator is primarily responsible for receipting, recording, and depositing receipts; making disbursements; and billing for paper service. The Sheriff indicated there are no other administrative staff in the Sheriff's office to segregate the duties or review the work, and the Sheriff does not perform a documented review of the Office Administrator's work. The Sheriff indicated he meets regularly with the Office Administrator and reviews all items processed by the Office Administrator before the items leave his office; however, his review is not documented.

Proper segregation of duties is necessary to ensure transactions are accounted for properly and assets are adequately safeguarded. Internal controls would be improved by segregating duties of receiving, recording, and depositing receipts; making disbursements; reconciling bank accounts; and billing. If proper segregation of duties cannot be achieved, documented independent or supervisory reviews of detailed accounting and bank records are essential and should include comparing daily receipts to deposits.

1.2 Bank reconciliations and liabilities

The Sheriff's Office Administrator does not prepare bank reconciliations or monthly lists of liabilities for the general account. According to the Office Administrator, she did not know when the last documented bank reconciliation was performed. As of August 2, 2024, the bank balance was \$1,672. After accounting for 1 outstanding check of \$840, the reconciled balance included \$832 of unidentified funds. The Sheriff stated there was money in the account when he assumed office in March 2024, and no research has been conducted to determine the source.

Because there is not a list of liabilities, the Office Administrator cannot ensure money is available to satisfy all liabilities. The Office Administrator indicated she has not performed bank reconciliations or identified liabilities because she had not been trained to do so. She indicated the previous Office Administrator compared the bank statements to a transaction ledger with a running balance; therefore, she continued that practice.

Preparing adequate monthly bank reconciliations and monthly lists of liabilities helps ensure receipts and disbursements are properly handled and recorded and increases the likelihood errors will be identified and corrected timely. Regular identification of liabilities and a comparison of liabilities to the reconciled bank balance is necessary to ensure accounting records are in balance and all amounts received are properly disbursed. Prompt follow up



Mercer County
Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

on discrepancies is necessary to resolve errors. Section 447.532, RSMo, provides that any funds held by a political subdivision that remain unclaimed for more than 3 years be turned over to the Missouri State Treasurer's Unclaimed Property Division.

1.3 Seized property controls

Sheriff's office personnel do not maintain a complete and accurate seized property inventory listing and do not conduct periodic physical inventories of seized property.

The Sheriff's office maintains both handwritten and electronic records of seized property. Evidence is recorded on handwritten evidence sheets kept in a binder inside the evidence room and the evidence is also logged in the software system. A new software system was implemented in April 2024. During the transition, some information did not transfer. The Sheriff has not performed a reconciliation of the new system and the physical evidence to ensure all evidence is in the new system. Physical evidence is segregated in bins within the evidence room; there is an evidence sheet in the binder for each bin, listing the contents. There are approximately 64 bins of evidence in the evidence room.¹ We haphazardly selected five evidence sheets to trace to evidence.

- One sheet did not record all items in the bin. A cigarette and a white tissue were not recorded.
- Two blood sample boxes in another bin were not recorded on the evidence sheet.

We also haphazardly selected five bins from the room to ensure they were recorded on the evidence sheets.

- A blood sample box in one bin was not recorded on the evidence sheet.
- Bullets and a pistol magazine in another bin were not recorded on the evidence sheet.
- A separate bin did not contain seven rounds of ammunition as recorded on the evidence sheet. The evidence officer was not able to locate the ammunition at the request of auditors.

Additionally, items remained in evidence bins despite destruction orders. The evidence sheets documented destruction dates, but the evidence had not been removed. A pistol was authorized for destruction in September 2022, and

¹ Due to the nature of the seized property room records we could not readily determine the population of seized items.



Mercer County Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

documented as destroyed the same month. A handwritten note was authorized for destruction in June 2023, and documented as destroyed in December 2023.

Considering the often-sensitive nature of seized property, adequate internal controls are essential and would significantly reduce the risk of loss, theft, or misuse of the property. Maintaining complete and accurate inventory control records and performing periodic physical inventories with the results compared to inventory records is necessary to ensure seized property is accounted for properly.

Recommendations

The Sheriff:

- 1.1 Segregate accounting duties or ensure adequate independent or supervisory reviews of detailed accounting and bank records are performed and documented.
- 1.2 Ensure adequate monthly bank reconciliations and lists of liabilities are prepared and reconciled timely. Any differences between accounting records and reconciliations should be promptly investigated and resolved.
- 1.3 Maintain a complete and accurate seized property log, ensure a periodic inventory is conducted and reconciled to the seized property log, and investigate any differences. In addition, the Sheriff needs to ensure items are destroyed timely when a destruction order is issued and wait to update records until the item is destroyed.

Auditee's Response

- 1.1 *The Sheriff implemented supervisory review procedures that include reviewing daily receipts and receipt logs, and comparing receipts to deposits monthly. All disbursements are prepared by the Administrative Assistant, and the Sheriff reviews supporting documentation and signs checks.*
- 1.2 *We have implemented the reconciliation of bank statements. The Administrative Assistant reconciles the account monthly, and the Sheriff reviews the reconciliation and signs off on the statements. The monthly ledger of the Sheriff's checking account is used to track liabilities, and all money collected is disbursed to the County Treasurer monthly. The unidentified balance has been disbursed to the Missouri State Treasurer's Unclaimed Property Division.*
- 1.3 *The Sheriff's Office has performed and logged an up-to-date inventory on all seized property. We have also verified and implemented the destruction process/period for all items. Once*



Mercer County
Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

destruction orders are received, the destruction is performed in a timely manner and records are then updated.

2. Public Administrator's Annual Settlements

The Public Administrator does not file annual settlements timely. The Public Administrator is the court-appointed personal representative for wards or decedent estates of the Circuit Court, Probate Division. The Public Administrator's office was responsible for the financial activity of 15 wards and estates as of December 31, 2024, including 4 decedent estates.

We haphazardly selected two active cases with annual settlements due in 2024 and one final settlement to review. We noted one case with a filing due date of December 2, 2024, had not been filed at the time test work was being conducted in June 2025; therefore, we reviewed the previous settlement for accuracy. Additionally, we reviewed all the cases the Public Administrator was responsible for as of December 31, 2024, for timeliness. Of 10 settlements due during the audit period, none were filed timely. Filing delays ranged from 31 to 297 days, limiting the court's ability to oversee case administration. The Public Administrator indicated she typically delivers all necessary documents in a timely manner to the law firm she uses to complete the annual settlement, but the firm's high workload causes the delay in filing settlements. However, the Public Administrator is still responsible for the timely filing of these settlements.

Sections 473.540 and 475.270, RSMo, require the Public Administrator to file an annual settlement with the court for each ward or estate. Timely filing of annual settlements is necessary for the court to properly oversee the administration of cases and reduce the possibility that errors, loss, theft, or misuse of funds will go undetected.

Recommendation

The Public Administrator ensure annual settlements are filed timely.

Auditee's Response

The office is now current on all settlements and will continue to work with the attorney's office to be more timely with the annual settlement filings.

3. Electronic Communication Policy

The county's Computer and Electronic Technology Usage Policy did not address records management and retention in compliance with the Missouri Secretary of State Records Services Division guidance, as approved by the Missouri Local Records Commission. This guidance recommends government entities have a policy on electronic messaging, including text messages, email, and other third party platforms.

Section 109.270, RSMo, provides that all records made or received by an official in the course of his/her public duties are public property and are not to be disposed of except as provided by law. Section 109.255, RSMo, provides that the Local Records Board issue directives for the destruction of



Mercer County
Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

records. The guidelines for managing electronic communications records can be found on the Secretary of State's website.²

Development of a written policy to address the use of electronic communications is necessary to ensure all documentation of official business of the county is retained as required by state law. The County Clerk indicated the county was unaware of the record retention requirements.

Recommendation

The County Commission work with other county officials to develop a written records management and retention policy to address electronic communications management and retention to comply with Missouri Secretary of State Records Services Division electronic communications guidelines.

Auditee's Response

The County did have an Electronic Communication Policy prior to when the audit was conducted, but we did not address retention as a part of that policy. After notification by the audit team, the county clerk prepared and the commission adopted an addendum to the Electronic Communication Policy to address this issue.

4. Electronic Data Security

Controls over the Sheriff's computers are not sufficient. As a result, county records are not adequately protected and are susceptible to unauthorized access or loss of data. The Sheriff's office does not require a minimum number of characters for its passwords. The Sheriff indicated he did not know the necessity of character length requirements.

Not requiring a minimum number of characters for passwords increases the risk of compromised passwords and unauthorized system access could occur. Passwords that have minimum character requirements reduce the risk of a compromised password and unauthorized access to and use of computers and data.

Recommendation

The County Commission work with the Sheriff to ensure passwords requirements include a minimum number of characters.

Auditee's Response

Minimum password recommendations have been updated and implemented.

² Missouri Secretary of State Records Services Division, *Electronic Communications Records Guidelines for Missouri Government*, May 14, 2019, is available at <<https://www.sos.mo.gov/CMSImages/LocalRecords/CommunicationsGuidelines.pdf>>, accessed July 28, 2026.

Mercer County

Organization and Statistical Information

Mercer County is a township-organized, third-class county. The county seat is Princeton. The county's population was 3,538 in 2020, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Mercer County's government is composed of a three-member county commission and separate elected officials performing various tasks. All elected officials serve 4-year terms. The county commission has mainly administrative duties in setting tax levies, appropriating county funds, appointing board members and trustees of special services, accounting for county property, maintaining county bridges, and performing miscellaneous duties not handled by other county officials. Principal functions of these other officials relate to law enforcement, property assessment, property tax collections, conduct of elections, and maintenance of financial and other records important to the county's citizens. In addition to elected officials, the county employed 11 full-time employees and 4 part-time employees on December 31, 2024. The townships maintain county roads.

County operations also include a Senior Citizens Board, a Recreation District Board, and a 911 Board.

Elected Officials

The elected officials and their compensation paid for the year ended December 31 (except as noted) are indicated below:

Officeholder	2025	2024
Jerry D. Allen, Presiding Commissioner	\$	41,836
Cheston G. Easter, Associate Commissioner		38,347
Zachary W. Martin, Associate Commissioner		38,347
Tammy Crouse, Circuit Clerk and Ex Officio Recorder of Deeds (1)		
Judy Hamilton, County Clerk		58,102
Pamela Blevins, Prosecuting Attorney		70,311
Jeff Spencer, Sheriff (2)		51,835
Jose Lopez, Sheriff (2)		15,406
Douglas Priest, County Coroner		16,001
Kelli Judd, Public Administrator		34,690
Susan Moore, County Collector-Treasurer (3) year ended March 31,	60,400	
Dana Widner, County Assessor, year ended August 31,		57,006

- (1) Compensation is paid by the state.
- (2) Jose Lopez resigned as Sheriff effective March 23, 2024. Jeff Spencer was appointed by the County Commission on March 25, 2024, to serve until the end of term.
- (3) Includes \$1,281 of commissions earned for collecting city property taxes.