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BELFAST, Maine — Following a 10-month police investigation, a 56-year-old Belfast woman has been charged in connection with the theft of \$83,000 from her family's furniture store, where she worked at as a bookkeeper.

Lauri J. Dawson was arrested Jan. 9 by Belfast police, but is out on \$5,000 unsecured bail while she waits to make her initial court appearance on Jan. 30.

The investigation began in March 2013 when Scott Macleod and Brent Macleod of Macleod Furniture in Belfast and their attorney Randy Mailloux visited the local police station to turn over results of a forensic audit done for the company by Norton & Masters Accounting of Rockland, according to an affidavit filed in Belfast district court.

That audit concluded that Dawson, a sister of the Macleods and a part owner of the corporation, had embezzled \$137,875 while working as bookkeeper in the family-owned business.

Scott Macleod told police, according to the affidavit, that the issue came to light after he learned that the company was having problems paying state and federal taxes and that liens had been placed on company property.

Detective Sgt. Bryan Cunningham said that while the forensic audit indicated \$137,000 had been embezzled, when the criminal complaint was filed the \$83,000 of which there was no question she had taken was listed as the amount.

Macleod told police that the family first tried to work out a settlement without

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investigation that both Lauri Dawson and her husband William Dawson were in serious financial trouble with multiple liens placed on their properties by the Internal Revenue Service.

Last fall, the Waldo County Probate Court acted to remove two elderly women from the control of William Dawson, an attorney who obtained a license to practice law in Maine in 1989. Both women had granted Dawson power of attorney. Documents entered into court showed that he had paid himself nearly \$150,000 from the bank accounts of an 86-year-old who suffers from memory loss and depression. The documents also show that over a 9-month period, he paid himself \$178,500 from the accounts of a 98-year-old woman who suffers from dementia. Both women are widows with no children and few family members living nearby.

The forensic audit on Macleod Furniture showed that Lauri Dawson had written additional payroll checks to herself from 2009 through 2012, according to the affidavit. In 2009, she paid herself 79 weekly payroll checks, 63 in 2010, 66 in 2011, and eight in the first five weeks of 2012, according to the affidavit.

The documents indicate Lauri Dawson also wrote checks from the furniture store to pay off personal expenses.

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