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May. 26, 2013

PORTLAND, Maine — The former head of a York County nonprofit organization was sentenced to two and a half years in prison Tuesday for embezzling approximately \$1 million from the organization to spend on his gambling habit.

Former longtime York County Community Action Corp. Executive Director Thomas Nelson, 56, of Alfred was sentenced to 30 months in prison and ordered to pay more than \$1.3 million in restitution — to his former employer, as well as its insurance company and the Internal Revenue Service — for a slate of charges that includes conspiracy, embezzlement from a federally funded program, tax evasion and signing false tax returns.

Nelson pleaded guilty to the charges last July. The criminal activity took place between 2004 and 2010.

York County Community Action Corp. oversees a variety of aid programs for low-income residents, including pre-kindergarten classes, fuel assistance and home weatherization services.

U.S. District Court Judge Nancy Torreson agreed to the 30-month sentence recommended by prosecutors from the U.S. Attorney's Office. She told Nelson she would have chosen a longer prison term, but wanted him to rejoin the workforce as soon as possible to begin paying back what he embezzled.

"I see this as money that could have been used to help people in need," Torreson told Nelson during the afternoon sentencing in Portland. "To me, you stole from people who could least afford it. ... When you get out, you're going to have to work hard, and

I expect you to repay what you owe. The people who turn to York County Community

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years.”

Bangor attorney Jeffrey Silverstein, representing Nelson, said his client acknowledged his wrongdoing, fueled by what the lawyer described as a “gambling habit that had run amok and gotten out of control.”

Nelson expressed remorse for his actions when he addressed the court.

“They’re great people who do great work and I let them down,” said the former 20-year head of the organization. “I don’t have a good excuse. You can’t feel more guilt than I do now.”

Joseph Groff, an attorney representing York County Community Action Corp., told reporters Tuesday that the organization has received insurance money to offset some of what was embezzled, and “the agency is putting this behind them.”

“This was a long time ago, and they’re trying to move on,” Groff said. “They’re doing well now.”

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