

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
District of New Jersey

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Philadelphia District Attorney Rufus Seth Williams Indicted On Bribery And Extortion Charges

Also Charged with Defrauding Nursing Home, Family Friends

PHILADELPHIA – A federal grand jury today returned a 23-count indictment charging Philadelphia District Attorney Rufus Seth Williams with bribery, extortion, and honest services wire fraud in connection with tens of thousands of dollars' worth of concealed bribes that he received from two business owners in exchange for his agreement to perform official acts. The indictment also charges Williams with defrauding a nursing home and family friends of money earmarked for a family member's care.

The charges were announced today by Acting New Jersey U.S. Attorney William E. Fitzpatrick, along with FBI Special Agent in Charge Michael Harpster, Philadelphia Division; Acting Special Agent in Charge Gregory Floyd of IRS-Criminal Investigation, Philadelphia Office; and Special Agent in Charge Marlon V. Miller of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Philadelphia.

Williams, 50, of Philadelphia, is charged with 10 counts of travel and use of interstate facilities to promote and facilitate bribery contrary to Pennsylvania law (the "Travel Act counts"), two counts of Hobbs Act extortion under color of official right, five counts of honest services wire fraud, and six counts of wire fraud. He will be arraigned in U.S. District Court in Philadelphia on a date to be determined.

"The indictment alleges that as District Attorney, Mr. Williams compromised himself and his elected office by standing ready to help those who were willing to pay him with money, trips, and cars," Acting U.S. Attorney William E. Fitzpatrick said. "Mr. Williams' alleged willingness to compromise his position of public trust in exchange for private financial gain is all the more unfortunate given that he was elected to protect the interests of the people of Philadelphia as their chief law enforcement officer."

"The alleged misconduct, as specifically laid out in this indictment, is brazen and wide-ranging, as is the idea that a District Attorney would so cavalierly trade on elected office for financial gain," FBI Special Agent in Charge Harpster said. "The immense authority vested to law enforcement has to be kept in check, and that requires decision-makers and leaders with a steady ethical compass. When elected or appointed officials stray from their sworn oaths, they must be held accountable. Combating public corruption remains the FBI's top criminal priority."

According to the indictment:

From July 2010 to July 2015, Williams solicited and accepted a stream of bribes from two business owners in exchange for Williams performing and agreeing to perform official acts for the business owners and their associates. In order to conceal these illegal arrangements, Williams filed false and misleading personal financial statements for the years 2012 through 2015, which intentionally omitted references to the valuable items that Williams received from the business owners during those years. After Williams learned of the federal investigation, he amended those financial

disclosure statements to list many of the items listed in the indictment, excluding a pre-owned 1997 Jaguar he received in June 2013.

The Unlawful Arrangement with Business Owner #1

From July 2010 through May 2015, Williams allegedly solicited and accepted a number of valuable items from an individual identified in the indictment as “Business Owner #1,” including an all-inclusive vacation to Punta Cana worth \$6,381, a custom sofa worth \$3,212, a \$502 dinner at a Philadelphia restaurant, a \$7,000 check, approximately \$2,000 in cash, a Louis Vuitton tie worth \$205, an iPad worth approximately \$300, a Burberry watch, and a Burberry purse for Williams’ girlfriend.

In exchange, Williams agreed to help Business Owner #1 with security screenings when Business Owner #1 returned from foreign travel. On numerous occasions, Williams contacted a Philadelphia police official in order to pressure and advise the police official to assist Business Owner #1 with those border encounters. On March 15, 2013, Williams met with the police official and Business Owner #1 and asked the police official to help Business Owner #1 avoid secondary screening. That same day, Williams accepted a \$7,000 check from Business Owner #1. Williams also repeatedly offered to write an official letter, under his authority as the District Attorney, on behalf of Business Owner #1 to pressure and advise the police official to assist Business Owner #1 with the border encounters.

Williams agreed to assist with criminal charges brought by the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office against Business Owner #1’s associate, an individual identified in the indictment as “Person #1.” Between Feb. 1, 2012, and Feb. 5, 2012 – while on the Punta Cana vacation paid for by Business Owner #1 – Business Owner #1 asked Williams to help with Person #1’s charges, and Williams agreed. On Feb. 8, 2012, just days after returning from Punta Cana, Williams received a text message from Business Owner #1 listing the docket number and hearing date for Person #1’s case. The text message stated that Person #1 would “take any punishment” but “just doesn’t wanna do jail!” Williams responded with a text message stating: “I will look into it.” Moments later, Williams asked about a second anticipated trip to Punta Cana paid for by Business Owner #1 and stated “I am merely a thankful beggar and don’t want to overstep my bounds in asking...but we will gladly go.”

When Business Owner #1 sent a text message in September 2012 again asking Williams to assist Person #1, Williams responded with text messages saying, among other things, “It seems like he has the possibility of having it thrown out or continued ... if it gets continued I will then ask for the file and see what can be done to make it a county sentence...”

The Unlawful Arrangement with Business Owner #2

From March 2012 through July 2015, Williams solicited and accepted from a Philadelphia bar owner identified in the indictment as “Business Owner #2” approximately 16 round-trip airline tickets to Florida, San Diego, and Las Vegas for himself, his girlfriend and members of his family. Williams also solicited and accepted from Business Owner #2 a 1997 Jaguar XK8 convertible and at least \$900 in cash.

In return for the benefits that he received from Business Owner #2, Williams appointed Business Owner #2 as Special Advisor to the Philadelphia District Attorney’s office in November 2012, including issuing an official badge, writing an official letter of appointment, and giving certain assignments to Business Owner #2 as Special Advisor. At the time, Business Owner #2 was on federal probation resulting from a June 2010 federal tax conviction.

In May 2013, Business Owner #2 requested that Williams write an official letter, as the Philadelphia District Attorney, acknowledging Business Owner #2’s appointment as Special Advisor to his office.

On May 10, 2013, Williams provided the letter to Business Owner #2. In June 2013, Williams accepted the Jaguar from Business Owner #2.

On June 2, 2014, Williams issued a second official letter to the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control in order to influence a then-pending hearing to revoke or suspend Business Owner #2's California liquor license.

In July 2015, Williams obtained a police accident report at Business Owner #2's request. During this time, Williams sent text messages to Business Owner #2 saying, among other things, "I wish I could help more," "Can I be a greeter or celebrity bartender to work off my debt...?" and "...I was serious about just doing whatever I can to help you guys!"

The Fraud on the Nursing Home and Family Friends

From February 2012 through November 2013, Williams allegedly diverted a relative's pension and Social Security payments to pay for his own personal expenses instead of applying them to the relative's nursing home costs, as was his obligation under agreements with the nursing home. Williams also falsely told a nursing home employee his relative spent the pension and Social Security payments. In addition, after accepting \$10,000 from friends of his relative intended to cover expenses for the relative's nursing home care, Williams spent the money on his personal expenses instead.

"Rooting out public corruption remains one of the IRS-Criminal Investigation's highest priorities," IRS Acting Special Agent in Charge Gregory Floyd said. "Today's indictment underscores our commitment to work in a collaborative effort to promote honest and ethical government at all levels and to prosecute those who allegedly violated the public's trust."

"Homeland Security Investigations will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to bring to justice public officials who betray the trust of the community by engaging in unscrupulous behavior," Marlon V. Miller, special agent in charge of HSI Philadelphia, said. "The public places an enormous amount of trust in elected officers, as such, they should be held accountable to a higher standard of conduct. HSI is pleased with the results of this criminal investigation and the collaborative efforts between our agency and our counterparts at the FBI and IRS."

Each of the Travel Act counts is punishable by a maximum potential penalty of five years in prison. The Hobbs Act extortion under color of official right and the wire fraud charges are punishable by a maximum potential penalty of 20 years in prison. Each count carries a potential fine of \$250,000 or twice the gross gain or loss from the offense. The indictment also seeks forfeiture of a total of \$54,466, representing the sum of \$34,146 worth of bribe proceeds and \$20,320 worth of fraud proceeds.

Acting U.S. Attorney Fitzpatrick credited special agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Harpster; special agents of IRS-Criminal Investigation, under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Floyd; and special agents of the HSI Philadelphia, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Miller, with the investigation leading to today's indictment. He also thanked the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services-Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Nick DiGiulio, for its participation in the investigation.

The U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania recused his office from the investigation involving the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, and the matter was assigned to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey. Two prosecutors from the Eastern District of Pennsylvania office were assigned to the case, subject to the supervision of prosecutors in the New Jersey office.

The government is represented by Deputy Chief Eric W. Moran of the U.S. Attorney's Office Criminal Division in Newark and Chief of Appeals Robert A. Zauzmer and Assistant U.S. Attorney Vineet Gauri of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Philadelphia.

The charges and allegations contained in the indictment are merely accusations, and the defendant is considered innocent unless and until proven guilty.