

NEWS

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Former Pleasantville Board of Education Member Convicted for
Scheme to Collect a Bribe in Exchange for School Board Contract

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CAMDEN – Former Pleasantville Board of Education member James T. McCormick was convicted by a federal jury today for accepting a \$3,500 bribe from an insurance brokerage in return for his official assistance in steering public contracts to the company, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

After seven hours of deliberations, which began Feb. 26, the jury convicted McCormick, 50, of all six counts contained in a federal Indictment that was returned on Nov. 28, 2007. McCormick was convicted of one count each of conspiracy, attempted extortion, bribery, violation of the federal Travel Act and two counts of money laundering.

The case was tried before U.S. District Judge Jerome B. Simandle by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Christopher J. Gramiccioni and Jenny R. Kramer.

According to the Indictment, McCormick participated with other Board of Education members and others in a scheme to agree to accept and actually accept corrupt cash payments in exchange for his and others' official assistance in obtaining contracts for an insurance brokerage company. McCormick then attempted to hide the corrupt proceeds by having the money wired to an account of another person who lived outside of New Jersey.

During the trial, the jury heard the testimony of five government witnesses, which included former Pleasantville Board of Education President Jayson Adams and former members James Pressley and Maurice "Pete" Callaway, who have all pleaded guilty for their roles in the scheme. The jury also viewed hundreds of pieces of evidence and heard secretly recorded conversations, regarding McCormick's scheme to trade official action for bribes.

In convicting McCormick of conspiracy, attempted extortion and bribery, the jury found that McCormick conspired with four other members of the Pleasantville Board of Education to vote to cancel an existing insurance brokerage contract and to award the contract to another company in exchange for corrupt payments to be made to each of the five board members.

In convicting McCormick of charges of violation of the federal Travel Act and money-laundering, the jury found that in late September 2006 McCormick arranged to have others, including a cooperating witness who was working with the federal authorities, arrange for a \$3,500 corrupt payment for him to be wire transferred to the bank account of a female friend located in Georgia. The jury also found that in February 2007 McCormick told his friend to send the \$3,500 in corrupt proceeds back to him by mail, and that McCormick received that money in late February 2007.

McCormick was among 11 public officials and one private individual arrested in September 2007 as part of a wide-ranging public corruption investigation by the FBI and U.S. Attorney's Office.

The conspiracy and attempted extortion counts each carry a statutory maximum prison sentence of 20 years and a fine of \$250,000. Each of the two money laundering counts carries a statutory maximum prison sentence of 20 years and a fine of \$500,000. The bribery and Travel Act counts each carry a statutory maximum prison sentence of 10 years and a fine of \$250,000.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Jerome B. Simandle will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, with the investigation leading to today's conviction; and prosecutors and investigators with the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Theodore F.L. Housel, for their substantial assistance in the investigation.

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Defense Attorney: James R. Murphy, Esq. Princeton