
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA : **CRIMINAL COMPLAINT**
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LAVERN WEBB-WASHINGTON : Mag. No. 09-8142 (MCA)

I, Robert J. Cooke, being duly sworn, state the following is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

From in or about March 2009 to in or about May 2009, in Hudson County, in the District of New Jersey and elsewhere, defendant

LAVERN WEBB-WASHINGTON

and others, to include JC Official 1 and the Consultant, did knowingly and willfully conspire to obstruct, delay, and affect interstate commerce by extortion under color of official right, by accepting and agreeing to accept corrupt payments that were paid and to be paid by another, with that person's consent, in exchange for defendant Lavern Webb-Washington's future official assistance in Jersey City Government matters.

In violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1951(a) and 2.

I further state that I am a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and that this complaint is based on the following facts:

SEE ATTACHMENT A

continued on the attached page and made a part hereof.

Robert J. Cooke, Special Agent
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Sworn to before me and subscribed in my presence,
July ___, 2009, at Newark, New Jersey

HONORABLE MADELINE COX ARLEO
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

Signature of Judicial Officer

ATTACHMENT A

I, Robert J. Cooke, am a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"). I have personally participated in this investigation and am aware of the facts contained herein, based upon my own investigation, as well as information provided to me by other law enforcement officers. Because this Attachment A is submitted for the limited purpose of establishing probable cause, I have not included herein the details of every aspect of the investigation. Statements attributable to individuals contained in this Attachment are related in substance and in part, except where otherwise indicated. All contacts discussed herein were recorded, except where otherwise indicated.

1. At all times relevant to this complaint, defendant LaVern Webb-Washington (hereinafter, "Webb-Washington") was a candidate for the Jersey City Ward F City Council seat with the election to be held on or about May 12, 2009. Her candidacy was unsuccessful. In addition, Webb-Washington, also a self-described housing activist, served as the head of the Webb-Washington Community Development Corporation ("WWCDC").

2. At all times relevant to this Complaint:

a. There was an individual who served as the Vice President of the Jersey City Board of Education (until on or about May 2009), and a commissioner of the Jersey City Housing Authority ("JC Official 1");

b. There was an individual who represented himself to be the owner of a consulting firm based in New Jersey (the "Consultant");

c. There was a cooperating witness (the "CW") who had been charged with bank fraud in a federal criminal complaint in May 2006. Thereafter, for the purposes of this investigation conducted by the FBI, the CW posed as a real estate developer interested in development in the greater Jersey City area. The CW represented that the CW did business in numerous states, including New York and New Jersey, and that the CW paid for goods and services in interstate commerce.

3. On or about March 20, 2009, at approximately 10:50 a.m., FBI agents intercepted an incoming call from defendant Webb-Washington to the Consultant over the Consultant's cell phone. During this call, the Consultant invited Webb-Washington to a meeting the following Tuesday to receive some

"contributions" from a "developer" - a reference to the CW - who would give the Consultant the money and the Consultant would give it to Webb-Washington, according to the Consultant.

4. On or about March 21, 2009, at approximately 10:55 a.m., FBI agents intercepted an outgoing phone call from the Consultant to JC Official 1 over the Consultant's cell phone. The Consultant and JC Official 1 confirmed the existence of upcoming, separate meetings between two Jersey City council candidates (one of whom was defendant Webb-Washington) and the CW. They also agreed that the CW has been "planting a lot of seeds" with various government officials in New Jersey.

5. On or about the afternoon of March 24, 2009, defendant Webb-Washington, along with her campaign manager, met the Consultant, JC Official 1 and the CW at a diner in Bayonne, New Jersey. Prior to meeting with defendant Webb-Washington and her campaign manager, the CW confirmed with the Consultant and JC Official 1 that the CW could make a cash payment to defendant Webb-Washington through JC Official 1 and the Consultant, prompting JC Official 1 to reply "[t]hat's right." After the CW was introduced to defendant Webb-Washington, the CW explained that the CW was a real estate developer with projects in Florida, New York City and the Carolinas. The CW also discussed the CW's purported development plans for Garfield Avenue in Jersey City and the impediment created by the restriction on the number of stories that could be built at the location. Defendant Webb-Washington also was informed by the CW that the CW would be seeking a zoning change from the Jersey City Council, and the Consultant added that "[d]ensity is the key to making money." Defendant Webb-Washington further was informed by the CW that the CW would be looking for defendant Webb-Washington's support for "zone change[s], resolution[s], approvals, stuff like that," prompting defendant Webb-Washington to reply, "Oh definitely, definitely. I get that done." Subsequently, the CW added that "what I'll do is, I'll give, uh, [the Consultant], uh, to start five thousand, as we get closer to the election, you know, we'll meet again . . ." As defendant Webb-Washington departed, the CW reiterated that the CW would "give [the Consultant] the envelope" for defendant Webb-Washington and added that it would not be done by check "'cause I don't wanna have any conflicts." In response, defendant Webb-Washington asked, "Can you do it as soon as possible?" The CW replied that "I'll give him [referring to the Consultant] the cash."

6. On or about March 24, 2009, at approximately 5:01 p.m., FBI agents intercepted an incoming call from JC Official 1 to the Consultant over the Consultant's cell phone. During the

call, among other things, JC Official 1 and the Consultant agreed that things had gone well at the meeting that day. The Consultant and JC Official 1 discussed plans for the CW and agreed, per the Consultant, "Let's get him to give . . . three candidates [including defendant Webb-Washington] money. . . ."

7. On or about March 25, 2009, at approximately 8:44 p.m., FBI agents intercepted an incoming call from JC Official 1 to the Consultant over the Consultant's cell phone. During this call, JC Official 1 told the Consultant that there would be no meeting the next day [Thursday], and they instead agreed to meet on Friday. JC Official 1 told the Consultant that Friday they would "do the two" - likely a reference to cash payments to be made to defendant Webb-Washington and another council candidate.

8. On or about March 26, 2009, at approximately 11:30 a.m., FBI agents intercepted an outgoing call from the Consultant over the Consultant's cell phone to JC Official 1. During this call, the Consultant asked JC Official 1 how their "buddy" [a reference to the CW] was doing, and JC Official 1 responded that JC Official 1 was postponing the meetings, a reference to meetings with defendant Webb-Washington, among others, until Monday at twelve o'clock at a diner in Hudson County, New Jersey. JC Official 1 stated that he would not "have them come in" the restaurant, but rather the CW would "have to go outside to them." JC Official 1 thus was indicating that the corrupt cash payments would be made to defendant Webb-Washington, among others, outside of the restaurant. JC Official 1 asked the Consultant if he "thought that was the best way to do it," and the Consultant said that he thought that it was.

9. On or about March 27, 2009, at approximately 11:36 a.m., FBI agents intercepted an incoming call from defendant Webb-Washington to the Consultant over the Consultant's cell phone. During the call, defendant Webb-Washington asked the Consultant if there "was any good news yet," to which the Consultant responded, "Yes," and told defendant Webb-Washington that she was to meet him "and [the CW] on Monday at twelve o'clock" at a particular restaurant in Hudson County where the CW would "give her the contribution." Defendant Webb-Washington said that she would just have to "try and make some other moves in the meantime [meaning take action to acquire money]."

10. On or about March 30, 2009, at approximately 10:54 a.m., FBI agents intercepted an incoming call from JC Official 1 to the Consultant over the Consultant's cell phone. During this call, JC Official 1 asked the Consultant to confirm that they were still planning to meet at the diner at noon. The Consultant

told JC Official 1 that the Consultant had called others, including defendant Webb-Washington, who would arrive at the diner at 12:30 p.m. Regarding defendant Webb-Washington and others who were scheduled to meet them at various times that day, JC Official 1 said, "Let's spread them out fifteen minutes difference, okay?" The Consultant agreed and asked JC Official 1: "How are we operating this? [They] are coming into the restaurant to see [the CW]?" JC Official 1 responded, "Yes they are coming in to see [the CW] and then whatever conversation you want and then they'll leave." The Consultant agreed and then asked JC Official 1, "And then how are we dealing with the money?" JC Official 1 responded to the Consultant that they would "talk to [the CW] about the money." JC Official 1 [laughing] then stated that, like he had said before, "they don't get any money" [meaning that JC Official 1 did not want to discuss the passing of payments to these individuals, including defendant Webb-Washington, over the telephone].

11. On or about March 30, 2009, at approximately 11:45 a.m., FBI agents intercepted an incoming call from defendant Webb-Washington to the Consultant over the Consultant's cell phone. During the call, the Consultant told defendant Webb-Washington to "be there at 12:30" and defendant Webb-Washington agreed.

12. Thereafter, that same day, defendant Webb-Washington met the Consultant, JC Official 1 and the CW at a diner in Bayonne. Defendant Webb-Washington and the CW discussed the location of the CW's proposed development on Garfield Avenue. A short time later, the CW asked defendant Webb-Washington if she wanted to "go for a little walk," and, as the two walked toward the diner's parking lot, defendant Webb-Washington was informed by the CW that "like we spoke about before. I'm gonna give you the 5,000 now," prompting defendant Webb-Washington to reply "[o]kay, no problem." After the CW explained that the \$5,000 was in the trunk of the CW's car, the CW told Washington that "[t]hen I'll give you another five before the election. And . . . after you get in, and I know you're on my team, I'll give you another 5,000." Defendant Webb-Washington replied "[n]o problem." The CW then removed an envelope from the trunk of the CW's vehicle and handed it to defendant Webb-Washington, stating "[t]hat's, uh, 5,000. That's cash. This way there's no, you know, no conflicts or anything." Defendant Webb-Washington accepted the envelope containing the \$5,000 in cash, stating "good, you don't need none." The CW then asked defendant Webb-Washington to "just make sure you expedite my stuff, and I know you'll . . ." Defendant Webb-Washington interjected, "Oh, no, you don't need to worry about me." The CW then asked "[a]nd you'll vote for me on

that zone change," prompting defendant Webb-Washington to reiterate, "You don't have to worry." Defendant Webb-Washington and the CW then exchanged contact information before defendant Webb-Washington drove away.

13. On or about April 21, 2009, the Consultant and JC Official 1 met the CW at a diner in Jersey City. The Consultant and JC Official 1 set forth the schedule and the identities of individuals with whom they would be meeting as well as the amounts of money to be paid to certain public officials and candidates. In particular, the Consultant informed the CW that they would then meet with defendant Webb-Washington at a diner in Bayonne around mid-day on April 23rd, at which time the CW would provide defendant Webb-Washington with an additional \$5,000.

14. On or about April 23, 2009, defendant Webb-Washington met JC Official 1, the Consultant and the CW at a diner in Bayonne. During the meeting, defendant Webb-Washington continued to promise to support a proposed zone change for CW's purported Garfield Avenue project once she was elected to the Jersey City Council. Defendant Webb-Washington told the CW that the CW was on the "top" of her list. In the diner's parking lot, while inside of her vehicle, defendant Webb-Washington accepted \$5,000 in cash from the CW in an envelope. Defendant Webb-Washington further indicated that to conceal the CW as the source of the contributions, she would indicate that the money was from her and then transfer it to her election fund. She agreed that she did not want the CW name on "nothing" so that down the line when she supported the CW's initiative regarding the Garfield Avenue project, no one could say that she was officially supporting the CW because the CW provided financial support to her.

15. On or about May 7, 2009, defendant Webb-Washington met with the CW in defendant Webb-Washington's vehicle in a parking lot of a diner in North Bergen, New Jersey. Defendant Webb-Washington indicated that another person had told her that she was ahead in the polls. Defendant Webb-Washington indicated to the CW that she needed money for her campaign. She further told the CW that she had the CW's "back" and was the main one to support the CW's purported Garfield Avenue development project. She responded "definitely," when the CW asked if the CW had her vote on this project. Defendant Webb-Washington also promised to obtain the vote of another Jersey City Council member for the CW. Defendant Webb-Washington then accepted \$5,000 in cash from the CW. Agreeing with the CW, defendant Washington indicated that she would not report the CW's name in connection with this cash payment because when she went to assist the CW after the election, she did not want anyone to connect the two of them.

Defendant Webb-Washington further remarked to the CW that she had "common sense" and it did not take "nine degrees" to make her do the "right thing." Responding to the CW's request not to forget the CW in July, defendant Webb-Washington said that the CW did not have to say this anymore and that she "got" the CW. As the conversation concluded, defendant Webb-Washington further remarked that the CW had her "back," and she had the CW's back.

16. On or about May 13, 2009, at approximately 4:52 p.m., FBI agents intercepted an incoming call from defendant Webb-Washington to the Consultant's cell phone. During this conversation, defendant Webb-Washington complained to the Consultant about the procedures surrounding the Jersey City election the previous day, which culminated in defendant Webb-Washington being behind in the vote count to her main opposition for a city council seat. The discussion turned to the run-off election, which defendant Webb-Washington said that she believed she was a part of, and the Consultant said: "They're going to try to pull every trick in the book." Defendant Webb-Washington said, "This isn't helping our friend [meaning the CW]. . . . [I]t don't help [the CW]. It don't help nobody, it don't help anybody to play with her [meaning the current Council member, whom defendant Webb-Washington hoped to unseat]." Defendant Webb-Washington and the CW then discussed, among other things, using the legal process to challenge the results of the election. Defendant Webb-Washington told the Consultant to tell the CW, among other things, that she was "not playing you know, because [the CW] will really get screwed over with [the incumbent Council member]. For real now. We have her in there and [the CW] stands to lose a lot of money."