



U. S. Department of Justice

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UNITED STATES ATTORNEY LAWRENCE KEEFE DETAILS PUBLIC TRUST UNIT'S FIRST-YEAR IMPACT ON CORRUPTION

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA – United States Attorney Lawrence Keefe of the Northern District of Florida today marked the one-year anniversary of his office's Public Trust Unit, highlighting the impact of almost 20 cases of public corruption and other wrongdoing that his office has pursued since he took the oath of office.

"At the heart of our American way of life is the sacred principle that a public office is a public trust, and we are fully committed to pursuing, prosecuting, and punishing anyone who would violate that trust," Keefe said. "Whether its elected officeholders selling their votes, appointed officials betraying their legal and ethical responsibilities, or medical providers defrauding public health care programs, they share one thing in common: They are eroding public faith in the institutions of government. And we will stop them."

One year ago, Keefe established the Public Trust Unit to serve as a specialized team of dedicated prosecutors and investigators who would work with other federal, state, and local authorities to actively pursue cases of public corruption throughout the 23 counties of the District. He hailed the Unit as succeeding beyond expectations to restore integrity, responsibility, and trust to public offices across the region.

"The word is out that we have zero tolerance for any betrayal of the public trust and that we will continue to vigorously make cases against those who put their own selfish interest above the public interest," Keefe said. "We hope this commitment also serves to have a deterrent effect on those who may be inclined to consider corrupting themselves or others in any scheme or scam."

To mark the anniversary, Keefe provided a list of corruption cases brought by his office since he became U.S. Attorney in January 2019, many of them pursued through the Public Trust Unit. The list identifies 19 cases involving 57 defendants. Among the highlights:

- The prosecution of former Tallahassee Mayor/City Commissioner Scott Maddox and two other individuals, stemming from a scheme in which Maddox took bribes for favorable votes as a member of the City Commission. Maddox and co-defendant Janice Paige Carter Smith have pled guilty, while the trial of co-defendant John Thomas Burnette is pending.
- Indictment and prosecution of seven individuals – including the City of Lynn Haven Mayor Margo Anderson, City Manager Michael White, City Attorney J. Adam Albritton, and the city’s Parks and Recreation Director – in a scheme to defraud taxpayers of \$5 million in funds provided for cleanup after Hurricane Michael.
- Indictment of multiple individuals – including a USDA Farm Service County Director, former Holmes County Clerk of Court Kyle Martin Hudson, a Public Defender investigator, and former police and correctional officers – in a conspiracy to steal federal government drought assistance funds.
- Sentencing of former Milton Mayor Guyland W. Thompson after he pled guilty to embezzling over \$650,000 from the United Way of Santa Rosa County.
- The indictment of several active law enforcement and correctional officers on charges ranging from assisting a drug enterprise, to participating in a dogfighting ring, to sexually assaulting a female inmate.
- Sentencing of a half-dozen separate U.S. Postal Service employees after convictions for stealing mail, including debit cards and checks, from residents of the District.
- The indictment and conviction of seven individuals on health care fraud charges, including separate cases involving fraudulent receipt of more than \$4.8 million from TRICARE (a federal health care program for uniformed service members, retirees, and their families) and over \$4.4 million from Medicare and Blue Cross Blue Shield.

“The shameful depths to which greedy people will stoop in order to enrich themselves at the expense of the taxpaying public is shocking and appalling,” U.S. Attorney Keefe said. “I have lived in North Florida nearly all my life, and it is clear to me that the overwhelming majority of individuals who serve in public office are good and honorable women and men dedicated to helping their neighbors and improving their communities. Thanks to the ongoing work of our Public Trust Unit, the word is getting out across the district that if you’re one of the small number that would violate the public trust, you will pay the price.”

Keefe said the work of the U.S. Attorney’s Office, including the Public Trust Unit, continues undeterred by the COVID-19 crisis. After a pause to adjust to the COVID-19 crisis, the U.S. Attorney’s Office has continued grand jury operations and criminal jury trials. As recently as this month, Keefe announced new indictments in the hurricane cleanup fraud case emanating from the City of Lynn Haven in Bay County.

A listing of public corruption cases brought by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Florida during Keefe’s tenure is available at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndfl/pr>.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Florida is one of 94 offices that serve as the nation’s principal litigators under the direction of the Attorney General. To access available public court documents online, please visit the [U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida](https://www.uscourts.gov/uscourt) website. For more information about the United States Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Florida, visit <http://www.justice.gov/usao/fln/index.html>.

The year 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of the Department of Justice. Learn more about the history of our agency at www.Justice.gov/Celebrating150Years.

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