

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS
EASTERN DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

WILLIE B. COCHRAN

No. 16 CR 808

Judge Jorge L. Alonso

PLEA AGREEMENT

1. This Plea Agreement between the United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, JOHN R. LAUSCH, JR., and defendant WILLIE B. COCHRAN, and his attorneys, CHRISTOPHER T. GROHMAN and MELISSA S. GELLER, is made pursuant to Rule 11 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure and is governed in part by Rule 11(c)(1)(A), as more fully set forth below. The parties to this Agreement have agreed upon the following:

Charges in This Case

2. The indictment in this case charges defendant with theft or bribery concerning programs receiving Federal funds, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 666(a)(1)(B) (Counts 1 and 3); interference with commerce by extortion, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1951 (Counts 2 and 4); and, wire fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343 (Counts 5 through 15).

3. Defendant has read the charges against him contained in the indictment, and those charges have been fully explained to him by his attorney.

4. Defendant fully understands the nature and elements of the crimes with which he has been charged.

Charge to Which Defendant Is Pleading Guilty

5. By this Plea Agreement, defendant agrees to enter a voluntary plea of guilty to the following count of the indictment: Count Eleven, which charges defendant with wire fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343.

Factual Basis

6. Defendant will plead guilty because he is in fact guilty of the charge contained in Count Eleven of the indictment. In pleading guilty, defendant admits the following facts and that those facts establish his guilt beyond a reasonable doubt and constitute relevant conduct pursuant to Guideline § 1B1.3:

Beginning in or around January 2010, and continuing to in or around April 2014, at Chicago, in the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, and elsewhere, defendant knowingly participated in a scheme to defraud donors to the 20th Ward Activities Fund, and to obtain money and property by means of materially false and fraudulent pretenses, representations, and promises, and concealment of materials facts.

Specifically, defendant was the publicly elected Alderman of the 20th Ward in Chicago. Defendant also operated the “20th Ward Activities Fund,” which he purported to use for charitable endeavors to help families and children living in the

20th Ward. Defendant controlled a bank account in the name of “20th Ward Activities Fund,” including debit cards tied to the bank account.

Defendant solicited from individuals and entities, including his own constituents, money donations to the 20th Ward Activities Fund. Defendant made solicitations in person and via mail and email. Defendant’s written solicitations were made on his aldermanic letterhead and identified defendant as Alderman of the 20th Ward. When soliciting donations, defendant falsely represented that all contributions to the 20th Ward Activities Fund would be used for charitable events hosted by the Fund, including a summer back-to-school picnic, a Valentine’s Day event for senior citizens, and events during the holiday season each November and December. In fact, defendant intended to divert some of the contribution money for his own personal use.

While events that defendant advertised for were actually held and paid for with money from the 20th Ward Activities Fund, defendant used some of the contribution money for his own personal use. After convincing donors to donate to the 20th Ward Activities Fund, defendant used some of the donations for his own personal use and expenses, including to pay his daughter’s tuition, to withdraw cash at casino ATMs, and to purchase items for his personal residence. While defendant personally donated in excess of approximately \$32,000 to the Fund, he withdrew money, and used that money for his own personal expenses in excess of that amount. Defendant acknowledges that between January 2010 and April 2014, he took

approximately \$14,285 in excess of what he donated from the 20th Ward Activities Fund, and converted the money to his own personal use. Defendant further acknowledges that he converted contributions for his own personal use from more than ten donors.

For example, based on defendant's false representations that Individual I's donation would be used for charitable endeavors benefiting citizens of the 20th Ward, on or about September 15, 2011, Individual I wrote check number 4064 from Company I to the 20th Ward Activities Fund in the amount of \$2,000. On or about September 22, 2011, defendant deposited check number 4064 into the 20th Ward Activities Fund bank account, which at the time had a negative balance of approximately \$797.60. On or about September 23, 2011, defendant made three ATM withdrawals, two of which occurred at the Ameristar East Casino, totaling approximately \$489.

On or about September 22, 2011, at Chicago, in the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, defendant, in furtherance of the scheme, knowingly caused to be transmitted by wire communication in interstate commerce certain writings, signs, signals, and sounds, namely, data relating to the deposit of check number 4064 in the amount of \$2,000 from Company I to "20th Ward Activities Fund" into JP Morgan Chase bank account *****0383, which wire communication was routed in interstate commerce through a server located in Delaware, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343.

Maximum Statutory Penalties

7. Defendant understands that the charge to which he is pleading guilty carries the following statutory penalties:

a. A maximum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment. This offense also carries a maximum fine of \$250,000. Defendant further understands that the judge also may impose a term of supervised release of not more than three years.

b. Defendant further understands that the Court must order restitution to the victims of the offense in an amount determined by the Court.

c. Pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 3013, defendant will be assessed \$100 on the charge to which he has pled guilty, in addition to any other penalty or restitution imposed.

Sentencing Guidelines Calculations

8. Defendant understands that in determining a sentence, the Court is obligated to calculate the applicable Sentencing Guidelines range, and to consider that range, possible departures under the Sentencing Guidelines, and other sentencing factors under 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a), which include: (i) the nature and circumstances of the offense and the history and characteristics of the defendant; (ii) the need for the sentence imposed to reflect the seriousness of the offense, promote respect for the law, and provide just punishment for the offense, afford adequate deterrence to criminal conduct, protect the public from further crimes of the defendant, and provide the defendant with needed educational or vocational training,

medical care, or other correctional treatment in the most effective manner; (iii) the kinds of sentences available; (iv) the need to avoid unwarranted sentence disparities among defendants with similar records who have been found guilty of similar conduct; and (v) the need to provide restitution to any victim of the offense.

9. For purposes of calculating the Sentencing Guidelines, the parties agree on the following points:

a. **Applicable Guidelines.** The Sentencing Guidelines to be considered in this case are those in effect at the time of sentencing. The following statements regarding the calculation of the Sentencing Guidelines are based on the Guidelines Manual currently in effect, namely the November 2016 Guidelines Manual.

b. **Offense Level Calculations.**

i. The base offense level is 7, pursuant to Guideline § 2B1.1(a)(1).

ii. The base offense level is increased by 2 levels because the loss amount is approximately \$14,285, which is more than \$6,500, pursuant to Guideline § 2B1.1(b)(1)(B).

iii. The offense level is increased by 2 levels because the offense involved 10 or more victims, pursuant to Guideline § 2B1.1(b)(2)(A).

iv. The offense level is increased by 2 levels because the offense involved a misrepresentation that the defendant was acting on behalf of a charitable organization, pursuant to Guideline §2B1.1(b)(9).

v. The offense level is increased by 2 levels because defendant abused a position of public or private trust in a manner that significantly facilitated the commission or concealment of the offense, pursuant to Guideline §3B1.3.

vi. Defendant has clearly demonstrated a recognition and affirmative acceptance of personal responsibility for his criminal conduct. If the government does not receive additional evidence in conflict with this provision, and if defendant continues to accept responsibility for his actions within the meaning of Guideline § 3E1.1(a), including by furnishing the United States Attorney's Office and the Probation Office with all requested financial information relevant to his ability to satisfy any fine or restitution that may be imposed in this case, a two-level reduction in the offense level is appropriate.

vii. In accord with Guideline § 3E1.1(b), defendant has timely notified the government of his intention to enter a plea of guilty, thereby permitting the government to avoid preparing for trial and permitting the Court to allocate its resources efficiently. Therefore, as provided by Guideline § 3E1.1(b), if the Court determines the offense level to be 16 or greater prior to determining that defendant is entitled to a two-level reduction for acceptance of responsibility, the government will move for an additional one-level reduction in the offense level.

c. **Criminal History Category.** With regard to determining defendant's criminal history points and criminal history category, based on the facts now known to the government, defendant's criminal history points equal zero and defendant's criminal history category is I.

d. **Anticipated Advisory Sentencing Guidelines Range.** Therefore, based on the facts now known to the government, the anticipated offense level is 13, which, when combined with the anticipated criminal history category of I, results in an anticipated advisory sentencing guidelines range of 12 to 18 months' imprisonment, in addition to any supervised release, fine, and restitution the Court may impose.

e. Defendant and his attorney and the government acknowledge that the above guidelines calculations are preliminary in nature, and are non-binding predictions upon which neither party is entitled to rely. Defendant understands that further review of the facts or applicable legal principles may lead the government to conclude that different or additional guidelines provisions apply in this case. Defendant understands that the Probation Office will conduct its own investigation and that the Court ultimately determines the facts and law relevant to sentencing, and that the Court's determinations govern the final guideline calculation. Accordingly, the validity of this Agreement is not contingent upon the probation officer's or the Court's concurrence with the above calculations, and defendant shall

not have a right to withdraw his plea on the basis of the Court's rejection of these calculations.

10. Both parties expressly acknowledge that this Agreement is not governed by Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(B), and that errors in applying or interpreting any of the sentencing guidelines may be corrected by either party prior to sentencing. The parties may correct these errors either by stipulation or by a statement to the Probation Office or the Court, setting forth the disagreement regarding the applicable provisions of the guidelines. The validity of this Agreement will not be affected by such corrections, and defendant shall not have a right to withdraw his plea, nor the government the right to vacate this Agreement, on the basis of such corrections.

Agreements Relating to Sentencing

11. The government is free to recommend whatever sentence it deems appropriate within the applicable guideline range. The defendant is free to recommend whatever sentence he deems appropriate.

12. It is understood by the parties that the sentencing judge is neither a party to nor bound by this Agreement and may impose a sentence up to the maximum penalties as set forth above. Defendant further acknowledges that if the Court does not accept the sentencing recommendation of the parties, defendant will have no right to withdraw his guilty plea.

13. Regarding restitution, defendant acknowledges that the total amount of restitution owed to victims is \$14,285, minus any credit for funds repaid prior to

sentencing, and that pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 3663A, the Court must order defendant to make full restitution in the amount outstanding at the time of sentencing.

14. Restitution shall be due immediately, and paid pursuant to a schedule to be set by the Court at sentencing. Defendant acknowledges that pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 3664(k), he is required to notify the Court and the United States Attorney's Office of any material change in economic circumstances that might affect his ability to pay restitution.

15. Defendant agrees to pay the special assessment of \$100 at the time of sentencing with a cashier's check or money order payable to the Clerk of the U.S. District Court.

16. Defendant agrees that the United States may enforce collection of any fine or restitution imposed in this case pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Sections 3572, 3613, and 3664(m), notwithstanding any payment schedule set by the Court.

17. After sentence has been imposed on the count to which defendant pleads guilty as agreed herein, the government will move to dismiss the remaining counts of the indictment, as well as the forfeiture allegation as to defendant.

Acknowledgments and Waivers Regarding Plea of Guilty

Nature of Agreement

18. This Agreement is entirely voluntary and represents the entire agreement between the United States Attorney and defendant regarding defendant's criminal liability in case 16 CR 808.

19. This Agreement concerns criminal liability only. Except as expressly set forth in this Agreement, nothing herein shall constitute a limitation, waiver, or release by the United States or any of its agencies of any administrative or judicial civil claim, demand, or cause of action it may have against defendant or any other person or entity. The obligations of this Agreement are limited to the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois and cannot bind any other federal, state, or local prosecuting, administrative, or regulatory authorities, except as expressly set forth in this Agreement.

Waiver of Rights

20. Defendant understands that by pleading guilty he surrenders certain rights, including the following:

a. **Trial rights.** Defendant has the right to persist in a plea of not guilty to the charges against him, and if he does, he would have the right to a public and speedy trial.

i. The trial could be either a jury trial or a trial by the judge sitting without a jury. However, in order that the trial be conducted by the judge

sitting without a jury, defendant, the government, and the judge all must agree that the trial be conducted by the judge without a jury.

ii. If the trial is a jury trial, the jury would be composed of twelve citizens from the district, selected at random. Defendant and his attorney would participate in choosing the jury by requesting that the Court remove prospective jurors for cause where actual bias or other disqualification is shown, or by removing prospective jurors without cause by exercising peremptory challenges.

iii. If the trial is a jury trial, the jury would be instructed that defendant is presumed innocent, that the government has the burden of proving defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, and that the jury could not convict him unless, after hearing all the evidence, it was persuaded of his guilt beyond a reasonable doubt and that it was to consider each count of the indictment separately. The jury would have to agree unanimously as to each count before it could return a verdict of guilty or not guilty as to that count.

iv. If the trial is held by the judge without a jury, the judge would find the facts and determine, after hearing all the evidence, and considering each count separately, whether or not the judge was persuaded that the government had established defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

v. At a trial, whether by a jury or a judge, the government would be required to present its witnesses and other evidence against defendant.

Defendant would be able to confront those government witnesses and his attorney would be able to cross-examine them.

vi. At a trial, defendant could present witnesses and other evidence in his own behalf. If the witnesses for defendant would not appear voluntarily, he could require their attendance through the subpoena power of the Court. A defendant is not required to present any evidence.

vii. At a trial, defendant would have a privilege against self-incrimination so that he could decline to testify, and no inference of guilt could be drawn from his refusal to testify. If defendant desired to do so, he could testify in his own behalf.

b. **Waiver of appellate and collateral rights.** Defendant further understands he is waiving all appellate issues that might have been available if he had exercised his right to trial. Defendant is aware that Title 28, United States Code, Section 1291, and Title 18, United States Code, Section 3742, afford a defendant the right to appeal his conviction and the sentence imposed. Acknowledging this, defendant knowingly waives the right to appeal his conviction, any pre-trial rulings by the Court, and any part of the sentence (or the manner in which that sentence was determined), including any term of imprisonment and fine within the maximums provided by law, and including any order of restitution or forfeiture, in exchange for the concessions made by the United States in this Agreement. In addition, defendant also waives his right to challenge his conviction and sentence, and the manner in

which the sentence was determined, in any collateral attack or future challenge, including but not limited to a motion brought under Title 28, United States Code, Section 2255. The waiver in this paragraph does not apply to a claim of involuntariness or ineffective assistance of counsel, nor does it prohibit defendant from seeking a reduction of sentence based directly on a change in the law that is applicable to defendant and that, prior to the filing of defendant's request for relief, has been expressly made retroactive by an Act of Congress, the Supreme Court, or the United States Sentencing Commission.

21. Defendant understands that by pleading guilty he is waiving all the rights set forth in the prior paragraphs, with the exception of the appellate rights specifically preserved above. Defendant's attorney has explained those rights to him, and the consequences of his waiver of those rights.

Presentence Investigation Report/Post-Sentence Supervision

22. Defendant understands that the United States Attorney's Office in its submission to the Probation Office as part of the Pre-Sentence Report and at sentencing shall fully apprise the District Court and the Probation Office of the nature, scope, and extent of defendant's conduct regarding the charges against him, and related matters. The government will make known all matters in aggravation and mitigation relevant to sentencing.

23. Defendant agrees to truthfully and completely execute a Financial Statement (with supporting documentation) prior to sentencing, to be provided to and

shared among the Court, the Probation Office, and the United States Attorney's Office regarding all details of his financial circumstances, including his recent income tax returns as specified by the probation officer. Defendant understands that providing false or incomplete information, or refusing to provide this information, may be used as a basis for denial of a reduction for acceptance of responsibility pursuant to Guideline § 3E1.1 and enhancement of his sentence for obstruction of justice under Guideline § 3C1.1, and may be prosecuted as a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1001 or as a contempt of the Court.

24. For the purpose of monitoring defendant's compliance with his obligations to pay a fine and restitution during any term of supervised release or probation to which defendant is sentenced, defendant further consents to the disclosure by the IRS to the Probation Office and the United States Attorney's Office of defendant's individual income tax returns (together with extensions, correspondence, and other tax information) filed subsequent to defendant's sentencing, to and including the final year of any period of supervised release or probation to which defendant is sentenced. Defendant also agrees that a certified copy of this Agreement shall be sufficient evidence of defendant's request to the IRS to disclose the returns and return information, as provided for in Title 26, United States Code, Section 6103(b).

Other Terms

25. Defendant agrees to cooperate with the United States Attorney's Office in collecting any unpaid fine and restitution for which defendant is liable, including providing financial statements and supporting records as requested by the United States Attorney's Office.

26. Defendant understands that, if convicted, a defendant who is not a United States citizen may be removed from the United States, denied citizenship, and denied admission to the United States in the future.

Conclusion

27. Defendant understands that this Agreement will be filed with the Court, will become a matter of public record, and may be disclosed to any person.

28. Defendant understands that his compliance with each part of this Agreement extends throughout the period of his sentence, and failure to abide by any term of the Agreement is a violation of the Agreement. Defendant further understands that in the event he violates this Agreement, the government, at its option, may move to vacate the Agreement, rendering it null and void, and thereafter prosecute defendant not subject to any of the limits set forth in this Agreement, or may move to resentence defendant or require defendant's specific performance of this Agreement. Defendant understands and agrees that in the event that the Court permits defendant to withdraw from this Agreement, or defendant breaches any of its terms and the government elects to void the Agreement and prosecute defendant,

any prosecutions that are not time-barred by the applicable statute of limitations on the date of the signing of this Agreement may be commenced against defendant in accordance with this paragraph, notwithstanding the expiration of the statute of limitations between the signing of this Agreement and the commencement of such prosecutions.

29. Should the judge refuse to accept defendant's plea of guilty, this Agreement shall become null and void and neither party will be bound to it.

30. Defendant and his attorney acknowledge that no threats, promises, or representations have been made, nor agreements reached, other than those set forth in this Agreement, to cause defendant to plead guilty.

31. Defendant acknowledges that he has read this Agreement and carefully reviewed each provision with his attorney. Defendant further acknowledges that he understands and voluntarily accepts each and every term and condition of this Agreement.

AGREED THIS DATE: _____

JOHN R. LAUSCH, JR.
United States Attorney

WILLIE B. COCHRAN
Defendant

HEATHER K. McSHAIN
CHRISTOPHER STETLER
Assistant U.S. Attorneys

CHRISTOPHER GROHMAN
Attorney for Defendant