

Somerville lawyer arrested, charged with attempting to bribe Medford police chief, authorities say

By [Emily Sweeney](#) Globe Staff, Updated June 24, 2022, 4:48 p.m.



US Attorney Rachael Rollins at the Moakley Federal Courthouse, Tuesday, May 24, 2022, in Boston. Rollins said that she "commend[s] the Chief of Police in Medford for reporting this illegal behavior to the FBI immediately." CHARLES KRUPA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Somerville lawyer was arrested Friday on charges that he allegedly took part in a scheme to bribe Medford's police chief in an attempt to secure approval for a marijuana dispensary, according to US Attorney Rachael S. Rollins's office.

Sean O'Donovan, 54, was indicted on two counts of honest services wire fraud and one count of bribery concerning programs receiving federal funds. He made an initial appearance in federal court in Boston Friday afternoon, Rollins's office said in a statement.

The indictment states that in 2018 a marijuana company retained O'Donovan as a consultant to assist in obtaining a host community agreement with the city of Medford. In February 2021, O'Donovan allegedly offered to pay a close relative of the Medford's police chief \$25,000 to speak about the company's application for the host community agreement.

The police chief was one of five local officials serving on Medford's cannabis advisory committee, and when he was informed of the alleged bribe, he "immediately alerted federal authorities," the statement said.

"Over the course of the investigation, O'Donovan, believing he had an agreement with Individual 1 and the Chief, offered to pay Individual 1 approximately \$25,000 in exchange for the Chief's favorable action on the Client's application," the statement said. "According to the indictment, O'Donovan took steps to conceal the true purpose of the planned bribe payment."

According to the indictment, O'Donovan allegedly proposed paying the bribe money in cash and pretending it was a loan, saying, "If I give you cash, there will be no trace," and rejected the idea of making a contract with the individual, saying he did not "think that's a good paper trail."

O'Donovan's attorney, Martin G. Weinberg, said O'Donovan was arrested on Cape Cod. O'Donovan pleaded not guilty to the charges and was released on personal recognizance, he said.

"These allegations test the outer limits of federal criminal law," Weinberg said in a

phone interview.

Weinberg said in this case, O'Donovan "didn't speak one word" to a public official and never offered "one dollar" to a public official.

When the case goes to trial, Weinberg said, "we will contend these allegations are outside the parameters of federal criminal law."

Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Boston Division, said O'Donovan was arrested by the FBI Friday "for allegedly engaging in a pay-to-play scheme in which he tried to capitalize on his insider access....for his own financial benefit."

"It is vitally important that host community agreements be awarded through a fair and transparent process, not through back-door deals funded by bribes to those in positions of power," Bonavolonta said in a statement. "We believe what we have uncovered in this case is not only an affront to all the hard-working businesses that play by the rules, but a betrayal of Mr. O'Donovan's client and the community's trust."

Rollins praised the Medford police chief for reporting the alleged bribery scheme to federal authorities.

"This case is about attempted corruption of government officials. I commend the Chief of Police in Medford for reporting this illegal behavior to the FBI immediately," Rollins said in the statement. "We must ensure that greed and unethical conduct do not undermine the proper functioning of city governments across our Commonwealth. This prosecution does just that."

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