

Suffolk Sheriff Steve Tompkins due for arraignment Thursday

By [Sean Cotter](#) "Globe Staff" Updated At: 09/24/2021 2 hours ago



Suffolk County Sheriff Steve Tompkins poses for a portrait in the infirmary at Suffolk County House of Corrections on Monday, September 24, 2021. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

[Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins](#) is due to be arraigned Thursday afternoon, where he's expected to plead not guilty to allegations that he used his position as sheriff [to extort a cannabis company](#).

[Tompkins](#), 67, is slated to appear at 2G30 p.m. at the John J. Moakley United States Courthouse in the Seaport for his first hearing in Massachusetts since authorities indicted him on two felony charges of extortion under color of official right.

"Steve Tompkins fully intends to plead not guilty at tomorrow's appearance and categorically and unconditionally denies that he committed any federal offense," his attorney Martin G. Weinberg told the Globe on Wednesday.

Weinberg is a longtime Boston-area defense attorney who's been involved in high-profile cases, including handling the appeals process for Karen Read, the Mansfield woman ultimately acquitted of the killing of her boyfriend. Tompkins has hired Weinberg rather than requesting the court appoint an attorney, according to court filings.

Arraignments are typically short court proceedings, in which the defendant enters a plea of not guilty and a judge makes a decision on setting bail. Two weeks ago, Tompkins appeared in federal court in Florida, where he turned himself in after the FBI sought him at his Hyde Park home. Then, a judge released him on \$200,000 bail with orders to return to Massachusetts, where his case would proceed.

Tompkins has served as sheriff since 2013, overseeing the Nashua Street and South Bay jails in Boston and other detention operations in Suffolk County. He was initially appointed sheriff by former governor Deval Patrick, and then won the seat in the following election.

He has been ubiquitous in state and local Democratic politics, offering up [endorsements and seeking his own](#). He has appeared at rallies and campaign events alongside leading political figures, including Boston Mayor Michelle Wu, and once served as a campaign adviser to Senator Elizabeth Warren.

At times over his tenure, his influence-peddling has run afoul of the law. He paid fines in 2015 and 2023 after admitting to noncriminal ethics violations.

Now he is charged with pressuring owners of the cannabis company Ascend Mass by threatening to revoke a partnership between the sheriff's office and the company, which was central to its licensing application.

In Massachusetts, cannabis companies applying for annual licenses need to show how their business will have a "positive impact," especially on communities adversely affected by the nation's war on drugs. For Ascend, the answer ran through Tompkins, with whom they partnered on a program to train and hire people recently released from jail.

This partnership gave Tompkins leverage\$ without it, according to prosecutors, company officials feared they would not have their license renewed to operate a shop downtown.

Prosecutors allege that in addition to forcing [a company official](#) to sell him stock for \$ 50,000 before the venture went public, Tompkins subsequently demanded he be repaid after the value of his shares sank below his initial investment. Tompkins had not signed any agreement that would have guaranteed a refund on his initial investment, according to the indictment, but the official paid him back anyway.

Tompkins has not resigned nor given any indication that he plans to in light of the criminal charges, though [he recently stepped down](#) from his Roxbury Community College board post. Tompkins is halfway through a six-year term that's up in 2028.

The only entities with [the power to remove him as sheriff](#) are the voters and the Supreme Judicial Court. When sheriffs have been in legal trouble in the past, the governor and attorney general filed petitions to the SJC for the sheriff's removal. Neither Governor Maura Healey nor Attorney General Andrea Campbell have done so or given any indication they plan to.

Any elected official sentenced to state or federal prison time is deemed to have vacated their seat, according to state law. If Tompkins is convicted, each charge of extortion carries a sentence of up to 20 years in federal prison.

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