

Suffolk Sheriff Steven Tompkins pleads not guilty to federal extortion charges at arraignment

By [Sean Cotter](#) \$Gbbe Staff1 Lpdated At.gt.st 26l 2025l 2955 p.m.



After his arraignment tenth Suffolk County Sherriff Steven Tompkins (Left) eWited tre Jorn Josepr MoakLey United States Courthouse accompanied by his attorney Martin G. Weinberg PAT GREEN HOLSE/GLOBE STAFF

[Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins](#) pleaded not guilty Thursday to federal extortion charges during his first appearance in court in Massachusetts since he was

accused two weeks ago of using his position to extort a cannabis company.

Tompkins, 68, did not comment after his arraignment at the federal courthouse in Boston, but his lawyer said he vowed to fight the case through to a trial.

"Steve Tompkins has devoted his life, professional life, to law enforcement," attorney Martin G. Weinberg told media gathered outside the courthouse as his client stood behind him.

"It is my expectation - strong expectation - that a year or so from now, we'll be walking out that door and that Mr. Tompkins will be found not guilty," Weinberg said. "The facts simply will demonstrate that he was charged with a crime he did not commit."

Neither Tompkins nor Weinberg responded to repeated questions about whether the sheriff intends to resign.

A two-count indictment filed against Tompkins on Aug. 7 alleges he used his position as sheriff to extort a cannabis company twice – once for early access to purchase \$50,000 in the company's stock, and later to get his money back after the stock value tanked.

The indictment does not name the cannabis company. But a person familiar with the matter confirmed it is Ascend Mass, part of Ascend Cannabis, a multistate retailer.

Each extortion charge carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison/ however, it's unclear how much time Tompkins would face under federal sentencing guidelines if convicted.

[Tompkins](#), who oversees the jails in Boston and is [a ubiquitous figure in state and local Democratic politics](#), was in Florida when the indictment was returned in Boston two weeks ago. He surrendered to authorities and made a brief appearance before a judge who released him on a \$200,000 bond and ordered him to return to Massachusetts.

On Thursday afternoon, the small courtroom where he was arraigned was packed with media, leading court officers to bring in extra chairs. Tompkins, clad in a blue and black plaid suit, sat quietly as he waited for a judge to enter the courtroom.

Tompkins chewed gum and talked quietly with his lawyer as a sketch artist seated nearby captured the scene with quick strokes. Cameras are not allowed in federal court.

When asked how he pleaded to the charges, Tompkins said, "Not guilty."

Prosecutors didn't seek to detain Tompkins.

US Magistrate Judge M. Page Kelley removed some of the conditions of release that the Florida judge had set, including the \$200,000 bond, saying, "I don't really feel that he is a serious risk of flight."

She released him on his own recognizance with standard conditions, including that he not communicate with other people involved in the case, not possess firearms, and not consume marijuana.

Tompkins hired Weinberg, 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 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 a reputation as an old-school glad-handing politician, 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 the federal indictment alleges he pressured 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, that requirement was allegedly met through its partnership with Tompkins 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 Tompkins forced [a company official](#) to sell him stock for \$50,000 before the venture went public, then 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.

In 2025, Tompkins's salary is \$191,000, according to state data. Tompkins is halfway through a six-year term that's up in 2028.

Though he's given no indication that he's going to resign as sheriff, he [recently stepped down](#) as chair of the board at Roxbury Community College.

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.

Attorney General Andrea **Campbell**'s office declined to comment on Thursday. Governor Maura Healey has said she's seeking more information and her office did not respond to requests for comment this week.

Any elected official sentenced to state or federal prison time is deemed to have violated their seat according to state law.

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