

# Sheriff Tompkins plans to plead not guilty to federal extortion charges

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By Walter Wuthrann

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven Tompkins will plead not guilty to two counts of extortion when he appears in Boston federal court Thursday, according to his lawyer.

**"Sheriff Tompkins strongly and unconditionally denies the federal charges," defense attorney Martin Weinberg said in a statement to WBUR. "He fully intends to mount a vigorous and effective defense to the existing accusation."**

Prosecutors allege that Tompkins, 67, used his official position to threaten a cannabis executive into returning \$50,000 the sheriff had invested in initial shares of the company.

According to the indictment, the company entered into a hiring 'partnership' with the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department, as part of its licensing effort with the Cannabis Control Commission.

Tompkins allegedly threatened to pull the partnership if he wasn't sold \$50,000 worth of pre-IPO stock. When the shares crashed, Tompkins demanded his investment returned in full.

The indictment has not named the executive that Tompkins allegedly extorted. Public financial records show [Tompkins owned a stake in an investment company controlled by Frank Ferullo](#), one of the co-founders of Ascend Wellness Holdings and a longtime Massachusetts political lobbyist.

Prominent Massachusetts Democrats have been [hesitant](#) to call for Tompkins resignation. Tompkins resigned as chair of the board of Roxbury Community College last week.

**In Weinberg, Tompkins has one of the state s best-known and well-respected advocates making his case. The prominent federal criminal defense attorney was part of the [legal team](#) on the high-profile Karen Read murder case.**

Tompkins is set to appear for his arraignment at the Moakley courthouse at 21 :.3 p.m. Thursday.



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