

Suffolk County sheriff seeks to have federal extortion charges dismissed

By [Tonya Alanez](#) Globe Staff, Updated October 10, 2025, 9:36 p.m.



After his Aug. 21 arraignment, Suffolk Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins (left) and his lawyer, Martin Weisberg, departed from federal court in Boston. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven Tompkins, who is [facing federal charges](#) for allegedly extorting a cannabis company that he invested in, argues that federal prosecutors failed to show that he engaged in a quid pro quo agreement or performed any official acts in exchange for payment, court filings show.

Tompkins filed a 28-page motion to dismiss on Oct. 10 in federal court in Boston asking that his two felony extortion charges be dismissed for failure to allege quid pro quo bribery.

“Mere allegations of fear, pressure, and demands are not sufficient to establish extortion,” Tompkins’ lawyer, Martin G. Weinberg, wrote in the motion. “Rather, there must be a quid pro quo agreement to exchange an official act for payment, which is lacking here.”

Tompkins was arrested in August on charges of allegedly [extorting a cannabis company](#), under the threat he would revoke a partnership with his office that was central to the company’s licensing application.

Prosecutors allege that in addition to forcing a company official to sell him stock before the venture went public for \$50,000, Tompkins subsequently demanded he be repaid after the value of his shares sank below his initial investment.

Tompkins, 67, was indicted on two counts of extortion under color of official right, which carry a maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison. He is free on \$200,000 bond.

Tompkins’s motion said his refund was not regained through extortion. It was not wrongful nor can it support a conviction, Weinberg wrote.

Tompkins has served as sheriff since 2013. He oversees a department with about 1,000 employees and is paid \$191,000 a year, according to state records.

He agreed to “step away” from his position while the case is pending, the Globe previously [reported](#).

As part of the legislation that shaped the cannabis industry in Massachusetts, the state requires businesses to lay out plans to promote diversity and to invest in individuals and communities disproportionately affected by previous cannabis prohibitions.

Federal prosecutors allege a cannabis company hoping to open in Boston sought to meet that licensing requirement through an agreement with Tompkins to train and hire people recently released from jail. But Tompkins, they allege, used that partnership to extort the stock deal.

In September 2019, Tompkins wrote a letter to the state cannabis commission saying his office would “help screen appropriate candidates for employment in their retail store,” through the sheriff’s Common Ground Institute program, which he created years earlier.

The partnership between the sheriff’s office and the company, according to the indictment, was a key element of the company’s pitch for a license. But as it moved through the licensing process, Tompkins allegedly began to pressure the company to sell him stock before it went public.

The company rebuffed him but Tompkins kept pushing, according to the indictment, telling the company they would need his cooperation to renew its license.

In late 2021 and early 2022, Tompkins was facing reelection. With campaign costs mounting, he allegedly contacted the company and demanded a refund on his \$50,000 in stock to pay for “his campaign and personal expenses.”

Tompkins had not signed any agreement that would have guaranteed a refund on his initial investment, but the official paid him back anyway, in five checks from May 2022 to July 2023, according to the indictment.

According to Tompkins’s motion to dismiss, “after making the investment, Mr. Tompkins had a right to sell it.”

“His request to do so was not ‘wrongful’ and not criminal,” the motion said. “The suggestion of any extortion demand by Mr. Tompkins is further undermined by the fact that it took ... 14 months to fully refund the investment.”

Additionally, the motion said, “the indictment does not even expressly identify a single act that Mr. Tompkins allegedly took in exchange for payment.”

“Instead, it vaguely asserts that Mr. Tompkins promised ‘favorable action or inaction’” pertaining to the company’s licensing, the motion said.

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